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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Hume's Dialogues

by

Michael A. Ross

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

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FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled .....
Hume's Dialogues
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Hume's Dialogues

Michael A. Ross

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to offer an interpretation of Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, that is consistent with regard to both the state of Natural Religion in eighteenth century England and the general philosophical position of Hume. In particular it will be argued that Philo's position in the Dialogues is one of agnosticism with regard to the role played by natural reason in supporting a system of religion; and that this agnosticism parallels Hume's sceptical position regarding reason in his epistemology.

In the first two chapters, background to the discussion of the Dialogues is provided. In Chapter I an outline of the rise of Natural Religion is presented in order to give an appreciation of the issues involved. The second chapter deals with Hume's doctrine of belief in order to reveal its bearing on the methodology employed by the proponents of Natural Religion.

In Chapters III and IV the two major issues confronting commentators on the Dialogues are discussed. Firstly, what was Hume trying to establish in the Dialogues? And secondly, who, if anyone, was meant to represent his opinions in this work? In Chapter III it is argued that Philo rejects the sufficiency of Cleanthes' design argument to establish a

system of religion and suggests that it is not reason, but rather faith, that most securely founds systems of religion.

While Chapter III carries with it the implication that Philo is Hume's spokesman in the Dialogues, Chapter IV considers this contention in some detail. After a review of various criticisms of the 'Philo is Hume' thesis, in which their inadequacy is noted, a comparison is made of the statements on religion made by Philo and Hume. It is concluded that Philo is Hume. A conclusion is offered in which the points established in the thesis are reviewed, and a speculation offered on what might have been Hume's final position on religion.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 1

Part I: Background to the Dialogues

Chapter

I THE RISE OF FREETHINKING 9

Deism 10
Scientific Theism 17

II THE NATURE OF BELIEF IN HUME'S PHILOSOPHY 25

Part II: The Dialogues

III THE MESSAGE OF THE DIALOGUES 34

Cleanthes' Argument 37
Philo's Criticism of the Argument 47
Conclusions on Natural Religion 63

IV. CHARACTER IDENTIFICATION IN THE DIALOGUES 73

Cleanthes is Hume 74
No One is Hume 80
Philo is Hume 82

V CONCLUSIONS 88

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY 91

INTRODUCTION

David Hume had become fascinated by religion early in his life. We know that before he was twenty he had filled a "manuscript book" full of his thoughts on the subject.[1] He had read The Whole Duty of Man -- a popular didactic treatise of the day outlining the responsibilities of the virtuous man[2] -- only to conclude that he would rather take his virtues from Cicero.[3] And shortly before his death he confessed to Boswell that he "never had entertained any belief in Religion since he began to read Locke and Clarke."[4]

While in France composing the Treatise of Human Nature he wrote an essay against the possibility of establishing miracles and sent a first draft of it to Henry Home (later Lord Kames) in 1737.[5] He forwent publishing it for fear of offending Bishop Joseph Butler to whom a copy of the Treatise

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[1] David Hume, Letters of David Hume, edited with an Introduction by J. Y. T. Grieg (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932), 1: p. 154.

[2] See Norman Kemp Smith's Introduction to his edition of Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1947), pp. 5-6.

[3] Hume, Letters, I: p. 34.

[4] Hume, Dialogues, p. 76.

[5] Hume, Letters, I: pp. 23-25.

was sent. However, his opinions on religion were still outspoken enough to cost him the chair of Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh University in 1745,[1] and he had earned the unenviable sobriquets of heretic, Deist, sceptic, and atheist.[2] In 1748 he published Philosophical Essays Concerning Human Understanding and included his essay "Of Miracles" and an essay "Of the Practical Consequences of Natural Religion" which proved to be a harbinger of the Dialogues.[3]

The first mention we have that Hume was at work on a book about Natural Religion comes in a letter of his to Gilbert Elliot on March 10, 1751.[4] In a later letter to Elliot he claimed that "the Subject is surely of the greatest Importance; and the Views of it so new as to challenge some Attention."[5] It was just this attention that Elliot and Adam Smith feared, for they continuously urged Hume against

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[1] David Hume, A Letter From a Gentleman to His Friend in Edinburgh, edited with an Introduction by E. C. Mossner and J. V. Price (Edinburgh: University Press, 1967).

[2] Hume, Letters, I: p. 57.

[3] Philosophical Essays was re-entitled Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding in 1758. "Consequences" was altered to "Of a Particular Providence and of a Future State" -- a title less apt than its predecessor.

[4] Hume, Letters, I: pp. 153-157.

[5] Ibid., p. 158.

publication;[1] and while he followed this advice while he lived, he never stopped revising and polishing this piece for which he admitted to having a "particular Partiality."[2] He wrote the Dialogues during the early 1750's (in the same period he wrote his other major works on religion: "Of Suicide," "On the Immortality of the Soul," and "The Natural History of Religion")[3] revised them about 1761 and in the few months preceding his death, after again modifying them, wrote Smith that "I find that nothing can be more cautiously and more artfully written."[4]

Hume went to extraordinary lengths to insure posthumous publication of The Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion[5] and it finally saw the light of day in the fall of 1779.

The aim of this thesis is to provide an interpretation of Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion that is consistent with regard to both the state of Natural Religion

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[1] Hume, Dialogues, p. 88.

[2] Hume, Letters, II: p. 326.

[3] The first two essays were composed in 1755 although suppressed -- with the exception of an unauthorized publication in French in 1770 -- until after Hume's death. The latter appeared as part of Four Dissertations in 1757.

[4] Hume, Letters, II: p. 334.

[5] Hume, Dialogues, pp. 86-92.

in eighteenth century England and the general tendencies of Hume's philosophy.

In the first two chapters two matters are dealt with that furnish a background to the issues involved in the Dialogues: Natural Religion and Hume's philosophy. Insofar as Hume's Dialogues concerns Natural Religion it is necessary to have an understanding of what constituted this religious creed at the time Hume was writing about it. Too often commentators, having failed in this regard, have not given the Dialogues its due. Cavendish referred to it as "disappointing" and wondered why Hume had missed his "opportunity for contributing something really original to Natural Religion."[1] A. E. Taylor described it as "wanting in high seriousness and logical coherency" and as "superficial."[2]

Although such opinions are regrettable they may be avoided. More so than most works, Hume's Dialogues must be read in accordance with its historical context. It was written in an age when men, infatuated with their achievements in the sciences, claimed that their empirical methods were equal to any task -- even that of establishing the

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[1] A. P. Cavendish, David Hume (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1968), p. 108.

[2] A. E. Taylor, "Symposium: The Present-Day Relevance of Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion," Aristotelian Society Supplementary (Vols. 17-18, 1939): 179.

existence and attributes of the deity.[1] The controversy of the day was not, as Taylor seems to think, between atheist and theist but between Deist and theist.[2] Neither group denied the existence of God and both shared the assumption that religion was essentially reasonable. The question was, as Sorley notes, "... what, on rational grounds, ought to be believed?"[3] The Deists argued that only what was empirically verifiable was reasonable and consequently, as Toland stated "... nothing revealed, whether as to its manner or existence, is more exempted from its disquisitions than the ordinary phenomena of nature."[4] The practical effect of this position was to cast doubt on the alleged truth of biblical miracles and supernatural revelations. The theists, on the other hand, rejected this stand. As Robert Boyle pointed out: "I cannot allow that the intellect of man is the genuine standard of truth, so that whatever

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[1]See R. S. Westfall, Science and Religion in Seventeenth Century England (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958), p. 34 where he quotes J. Wilkins as saying that scientific inquiry "... proves a God and a providence, and incites our hearts to a greater admiration and fear of His omnipotency."

[2]Taylor, Symposium, p. 180.

[3]W. R. Sorley, A History of British Philosophy to 1900 (Cambridge University Press, 1965), p. 145.

[4]John Toland, "Christianity Not Mysterious" in Deism and Natural Religion, edited with an Introduction by E. G. Waring (New York: F. Ungar Publishing Co., 1967), p. 4.

surpasses his comprehension must not be admitted to be."[1] Simply put then, the Deists asserted that man could attain knowledge of God strictly by arguing from the phenomena of nature[2] whereas the theists maintained that this was insufficient and must be supplemented by the revelations contained in the scriptures.[3]

Bearing the above in mind, Hume's skeptical views concerning the capabilities of man's reason in arriving at certainty take on considerable significance. For if empirical reasoning could not attain certainty, and in many cases could only claim a measure of probability, then Natural Religion, founded as it was on the design argument, was in jeopardy. The parallel to a skeptical epistemology such as Hume's is, in the philosophy of religion, agnosticism. As J. S. Mill puts it:

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[1] Westfall, Science and Religion, p. 168.

[2] Hence the term 'natural reason'-reasoning based upon our experience of nature or what we might call empirical or inductive reasoning, although the use of the term in Hume's day often did not accord with even this vague definition.

[3] Again, the meaning of Deist and theist in the preceding is by no means definitive -- it is indicative only of general characteristics.

> . . . the rational attitude of a thinking mind towards . . . natural or . . . revealed religion, is that of scepticism as distinguished from belief on the one hand, and from atheism on the other.[1]

In Chapters III and IV our discussion concerns the two major issues in the Dialogues: What conclusions does Philo come to regarding Natural Religion, as a result of his analysis of Cleanthes' design argument? And which disputant in the Dialogues, if any, is meant to represent Hume?

With regard to the first issue I shall be maintaining that what is referred to as the 'design argument' is best seen as consisting of two parts. In the first, an analogy is drawn between the alleged design in the universe and the design evident in man-made productions. This is what I call the 'design analogy'; the conclusion of which is that the designers in both these cases probably share some vague intellectual similarity. The second part of the design argument is intended to establish the further claim that on the basis of this anthropomorphic analogy several other attributes of the deity may be inferred. This is a crucial step for the Deists to make if they are to generate a moral system -- for their knowledge of God proceeds by analogy with man. And if the most they can claim is vague intellectual similarity then they cannot establish a system of religion involving duties, responsibilities, etc.

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[1] J. S. Mill, "Theism" in Three Essays on Religion (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1885), p. 242.

With respect to the above division, I shall be arguing that while Philo accepted that the 'design analogy' had a measure of plausibility, he denied that it led beyond itself to a system of religion. By rejecting the second part of the design argument, Philo succeeded in undermining Natural Religion, and accordingly drew the conclusion that 'faith' and not 'reason' provided the surest support for religion.

Having established Philo as the victor in the Dialogues we draw the natural conclusion that he is meant to speak for Hume. This view is double-checked by a consideration of the arguments against it, along with a comparison of the similarity of the positions held by Philo and Hume, with particular regard to the claim that faith is the best foundation of religion.

We end our discussion with a brief review and a final speculation on what may very well have been Hume's personal consideration of religion.

CHAPTER I

THE RISE OF FREETHINKING

In this chapter we shall be discussing the growth of religious freethinking in late seventeenth and early eighteenth century England. It will be noted that there existed considerable turmoil within the Protestant Church at this time and that as a result several attempts were made to end the internecine disputes either by re-establishing Christianity, or by inaugurating a universal religion, on reasonable, rather than on revelatory, grounds. Collectively, exponents of this approach were known as Deists, and their creed referred to as Natural Religion. Although hardly a single Deist agreed with any other about the articles of their shared religion, they all agreed that it was founded on the conjunction of man's reason and his experience of natural phenomena.

During the same period of time that the Deists were flowering, the Royal Society was coming to maturity. Although its members were practicing Christians, the methods they employed and the discoveries they made resulted more in the deification of nature than in an anthem to the Christian God. Consequently, they attracted the ire of orthodox Christianity. By way of defending themselves from charges of

irreligion, members of the society argued more and more frequently that to be a scientist was to be God's most faithful worshipper; for every discovery of order, purpose, and beauty in nature added yet another proof of divine existence. The particular expression of this point of view took the form of the design argument.

The Deists found in the design argument a natural and supposedly invincible foundation for their Natural Religion. Here was an argument, rooted in experience, that had been developed by man's reason into a system of religion. The result was a strange marriage between the Deists and the members of the Royal Society. As Barbour, in Issues in Science and Religion, notes:

> Although the seventeenth-century virtuosi still considered themselves Christians, they ended with a concept of God that was indistinguishable from that of Deism: the God who started the machine and left it to run by itself.[1]

Deism

> Who born within the last forty years has read one word of Collins, and Toland, and Tindal, and Chubb, and Morgan, and that whole race who called themselves Freethinkers? Who now reads Bolingbroke? Who ever read him through?[2]

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[1] I. G. Barbour, Issues in Science and Religion (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1971), p. 54.

[2] Rhetorical question asked by Edmund Burke in Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790). Cited in E. C. Mossner, Bishop Butler and the Age of Reason (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1936), p. 154.

The dispute between Protestantism and Catholicism which had typified the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had given way to a dispute among Protestants; for, while freed from the doctrinal interpretation of the Scriptures offered by the Romish Church, the Protestants had yet to replace it with their own. Accordingly, countless sects arose, each offering its own creed which in some cases bore only the remotest link with Christianity. In his Christianity As Old as the Creation, Matthew Tindal (1657-1735) quotes one Dr. Scot on the situation:

> While Men behold the State of Religion thus miserably broken and divided, and the Professors of it crumbled into so many Sects and Parties, and each Party spitting Fire and Damnation at its Adversary; so that, if all say true, or indeed, any Two of them in five hundred Sects, which there are in the World; (and for ought, I know, there may be five thousand) it is five hundred to One, but that every One is damn'd because every One damns All but itself; and itself is damn'd by four hundred and ninety nine.[1]

To make matters worse, there was a growing number of individuals who eschewed the Scriptures altogether, claiming as a substitute for this body of truths their own divine inspiration. They were known as Enthusiasts. Hobbes defined their ravings as "the insignificant speeches of madmen, supposed to be possessed with a divine spirit, which possession they called enthusiasm."[2] The ability to act as a receptor

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[1] M. Tindal, Christianity as Old as the Creation (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Gunther Holzboog, 1967), p. 137. Originally published in 1730.

[2] T. Hobbes, Leviathon (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1947), p. 99. Originally published in 1651.

for this divine intervention proliferated, it would appear, among the deranged, as the following sketch indicates:

> [They] rejected magistrates, yet set themselves up as kings; holding community of wives and goods, went naked, and so met in their very conventicles, and were authors of infinite abominations, murders, rebellions, and mischiefs.[1]

The situation brought about by the widespread growth of Sectarianism and Enthusiasm was intolerable. If Protestantism was to survive as a viable faith some common ground had to be found that all the sects could share. The basic truths of Protestantism had to be formulated in such a manner that Enthusiasm was excluded and Sectarianism dissolved.

The first recorded occurrence of the term 'Deism' is in Viret's Instruction Chretienne (1563):

> J'ai entendu qu'il y en a de ceste bande, qui s'appellent Deistes, d'un mot tout nouveau lequel ils veulent oposer a Atheiste.[2]

Peter Viret (1511-1571), a follower of Calvin and minister of the Reform Church, called these first Deists "monsters" for while believing in a creator-God, ". . . with respect to Jesus Christ, they knew nothing about him, and shew no regard to him

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[1]Quoted from J. Evelyn's seventeenth century, The History of Religion. Cited in R. L. Emerson, "Heresy, the Social Order, and English Deism," Church History (December 1968), p. 393.

[2]The compact edition of the Oxford English Dictionary, 1971 ed., s.v. "Deist".

or his doctrine."[1]

Little else is heard of continental Deism until the early eighteenth century and that is largely due to the English Deists and their effect on men such as Voltaire.[2] Meanwhile the conditions in England proved more favourable to the growth of Deism.[3] The English Deists believed that a universal religion was necessary, as Leland notes in his A View of the Principal Deistical Writers, ". . . as the best way to prevent man's having no religion at all."[4] Cherbury, generally credited as being England's first Deist, listed five articles which he claimed represented the essence of all religions. They alone he claimed were sufficient to provide man's spiritual guidance. They were:

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[1] Dictionary, 1734-1741, English ed., s.v. "Viret," by P. Bayle.

[2] See N. L. Torrey, Voltaire and the English Deists (Hamden, Connecticut: Anchor Books, 1967).

[3] See R. W. Frantz, The English Traveller (New York: Octagon Books, 1968).

[4] John Leland, A View of the Principal Deistical Writers, 2 Vols., (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1798), p. 5.

There is a Supreme God.

This Sovereign Deity ought to be Worshipped.

The connection of Virtue with Piety, defined in this work as the right conformation of the faculties, is and always has been held to be, the most important part of religious practice.

The minds of men have always been filled with horror for their wickedness. Their vices and crimes have been obvious to them. They must be expiated by repentance.

There is Reward or Punishment after this life.[1]

Cherbury's successor, Charles Blount, before sending a bullet through his brain, added a few more articles to the list and insisted that the Scriptures were not meant to be taken literally but rather allegorically. This, naturally enough, initiated a grand quarrel between the Deists and the Protestant clergy. The Deists believed that the miraculous happenings related by the Bible were unreasonable if taken literally inasmuch as they contradicted our experience. It was this reliance on a strict reading of the Scriptures they claimed that was causing so much woe to Christianity, for no two readings ever turned out the same. Anthony Collins in his Discourse on Free-Thinking (1713) went so far as to suggest that ". . . before the restoration of learning, when men were subject to the impositions of priests, a

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[1] Edward, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, De Veritate, trans. with an Introduction by M. H. Carre (Bristol, England: F. W. Arrowsmith, 1937), pp. 291, 293, 296, 298, 300. Originally published in 1624.

prodigious ignorance prevailed."[1] The only way to save Christianity was to show that it was based upon reason and not mysteriously supported by a host of dubious miracles.

John Toland (1670-1722), the first Deist of major importance, was a follower of John Locke. In his Christianity Not Mysterious (1696), Told proclaimed the Deist manifesto:

> . . . we hold that reason is the only foundation of all certitude, and that nothing revealed, whether as to its manner or existence, is more exempted from its disquisitions than the ordinary phenomena of nature.[2]

In other words, so far as it could be given a reasonable explanation, founded, as the Deists were fond of saying, on the 'nature of things', so far was Christianity believable.

The point that Toland wished to stress was that because ". . . religion is calculated for reasonable creatures, 'tis conviction and not authority that should bear weight with them."[3] By following one's reason it was thought that one could separate the true Christian sects from the false; whereas by blindly believing any miracle and

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[1]Anthony Collins, "Discourse on Free-Thinking," in Deism and Natural Religion, edited with an Introduction by E. G. Waring (New York: F. Ungar Publishing Co., 1967), p. 57.

[2]John Toland, "Christianity Not Mysterious," in Deism and Natural Religion, edited with an Introduction by E. G. Waring (New York: F. Ungar Publishing Co., 1967), p. 4. Previously cited on p. 5.

[3]Ibid., p. 2.

subscribing wholly to authority one could easily be misled. Tindal put the matter in simple terms:

> . . . if you are to be govern'd by the latter, [Scriptures] That supposes you must take every thing on Trust; or meerly because its said by those, for whose Dictates you are to have an implicit Faith: For to examine into the Truth of what they say, is renouncing their Authority; as on the contrary, if Men are to be govern'd by their Reason, they are not to admit any thing further than as they see it reasonable. To suppose both consistent, is to suppose it consistent to take, and not to take, Things on Trust.[1]

The central tenet in the Deist's creed then, was that religion is essentially reasonable, and their faith became known as Natural Religion which Tindal defined as

> . . . the Belief of the Existence of a God, and the Sense and Practice of those Duties, which result from the Knowledge, we, by our Reason, have of him, and his Perfections; and of ourselves, and our own Imperfections; and of the Relation we stand in to him, and to our Fellow-Creatures; so that the Religion of Nature takes in every thing that is founded on the Reason and Nature of Things.

At this point we might sum up the position of the Deists in the following way: To the extent that Deism can be called a movement it arose and was sustained by individuals who, in most cases, wished to perpetuate a basically Christian system of religion.[3] They differed from orthodox

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[1]Tindal, Creation, p. 186.

[2]Ibid., p. 13.

[3]". . . Natural Religion . . . differs not from Reveal'd, but in the Manner of its being communicated: The One being the Internal, as the Other the External Revelation of the same Unchangeable Will of a Being, who is alike at all times infinitely Wise and Good." Ibid., p. 3.

Christians primarily by regarding Biblical miracles and revelations as allegorical rather than literal. This was due to their belief that it was the endless wrangling over which interpretation best suited a given passage in the Scriptures that was causing the rifts in the Christian church. In order to avoid the debilitating effects of this internecine conflict the Deists suggested that the essence of Christianity could be arrived at solely by the judicious employment of man's reason with regard to the teachings of nature. By founding Christianity on reason, rather than on authority or scriptural revelation, they felt that its truth could be placed beyond all doubt.

In view of this emphasis on the use of reason in matters of religion, it is not surprising that the Deists avidly adopted the design argument developed within the Royal Society. For here was proof supreme of the abilities of man's reasoning powers provided by no less than the leading intellectual figures of the day.

Scientific Theism

> That by this means there was a race of yong Men provided, against the next Age, whose minds receiving from them, their first Impressions of sober and generous knowledge, were invincibly arm'd against all the inchantments of Enthusiasm.[1]

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[1] T. Sprat, History of the Royal Society, edited with an Introduction by J. I. Cope and H. W. Jones (St. Louis: Washington University Studies, 1959), p. 53.

In 1619 when Edmund Gunter assumed the chair of Astronomy at Gresham College, London, he began a practice of holding informal meetings with colleagues in which matters of scientific research were discussed. Under the aegis of his successors, Henry Gellibrand and Samuel Foster, these gatherings increased both in frequency and size until the early forties when weekly meetings were held in Foster's rooms. The Gresham group, although particularly interested in science, had attracted, due to the considerable freedom of thought exercised at its discussions, the English Comenians, who in turn appreciated a forum for their irenicism.[1]

It was not long before these two groups were joined by Dr. John Wilkins of Wadham College, Oxford. Wilkins and his disciples were anxious to get down to the business of natural philosophy, which, as far as they were concerned, could only begin after the appalling misuse of language was ended. These three factions were mutually beneficial and shared the all-important Baconian belief that natural knowledge could and would be systematized. They were granted a charter by the King in 1662 and became known as the Royal Society.[2]

The characteristic most typical of the early Royal Society was its desire to promote the growth of natural philosophy. As Joseph Glanvil (1636-1680) acknowledged,

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[1]Ibid., "Introduction."

[2]Sprat himself only traces the origin of the Royal Society from Wilkins, his mentor.

Bacon had anticipated the Society's aim in the New Atlantis (1627):

> The end of our foundation is the knowledge of causes, and secret motions of things; and the enlarging of the bounds of human empire, to the effecting of all things possible.[1]

The chief hindrance to their aim was considered to be the fabulous use of language. Language, the virtuosi insisted, was meant to reflect the natural world and not, as often appeared to be the case, the miscellaneous excogitations of bewildered brains. As Wilkins claimed, in An Essay Towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language (1668), a philosophical language would even

> . . . contribute much to the clearing of some of our Modern differences in Religion by unmasking many wild errors, that shelter themselves under the disguise of affected phrases.[2]

Thomas Sprat in his History of the Royal Society (1667) added that the virtuosi preferred ". . . the language of Artizans, Countreymen, and Merchants, before that, of Wits, or Scholars."[3] The Royal Society had resolved

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[1] F. Bacon, "New Atlantis," in Essays and New Atlantis (New York: Walter J. Black, Inc., 1942), p. 288. Sprat, in his History quotes Glanvil's Scepsis Scientifica (1665): "Saloman's House in the New Atlantis was a Prophetick Scheam of the Royal Society," p. xii.

[2] Ibid., p. xxvii.

[3] Ibid., p. 113.

> . . . to represent Truth, cloth'd with Bodies, and to bring Knowledge back again to our very senses, from whence it was first deriv'd to our understandings.[1]

The members of the Society bubbled with optimism and confidence. Glanvil claimed that the very law of God's mind was exemplified in the physical laws of nature while the ebullient Sprat, reaching dizzying new heights with his own rhetoric, suggested that

> . . . the Church of England . . . persist, as it has begun to incourage Experiments, which will be to our Church as the British Oak is to our Empire, an ornament and defence to the soil wherein it is planted.[2]

Unfortunately for the fledgling Royal Society the remainder of England's learned community did not view them as saviours. To the contrary, the virtuosi attracted the displeasure not only of the Enthusiasts -- with whom they would willingly battle -- but also of the Colleges, the Cambridge Platonists, and the rival Royal College of Physicians all of which intensely disliked this meddlesome group of upstarts. What was considered specifically irksome about the Society was the manner in which its members seemed to view God's sublime creation, the universe. As Westfall notes:

> With the growing prestige of science -- it achieved immense prestige after the publication of Newton's Principia -- its reconciliation with Christianity

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[1] Ibid., p. 112. Sprat also says on p. 336: ". . . that knowledge which is only founded on thots and words, has seldom any other end, but the breeding and increasing of more thots and words . . . ."

[2] Ibid., p. 374.

> came more and more to mean the adjustment of Christian beliefs to conform to the conclusions of science.[1]

As far back as 1646 Alexander Ross had warned of the blasphemous position of the scientists:

> Whereas you say, that astronomy serves to confirm the truth of the Holy Scriptures you are very preposterous; for you will have the truth of Scripture confirmed by astronomy, but you will not have the truth of astronomy confirmed by Scripture.[2]

The members of the Royal Society -- seven out of ten of whom were Puritans[3] -- refused to let such narrow-mindedness stand in their way. They unflinchingly pursued their investigations and increasingly resorted to the position that the evidence of design and order throughout nature provided the most magnificent possible display of God's power and the surest proof of his existence.[4] To be a scientist was to be God's most appreciative worshipper. Each new discovery was an added testament to the wisdom of God. Barton proclaimed that ". . . every lump of matter, is a lesson of divine

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[1] R. S. Westfall, Science and Religion in Seventeenth Century England (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958), p. 3.

[2] Ibid., p. 21.

[3] Barbour, Issues, p. 48.

[4] J. Wilkins claimed that science ". . . proves a God and a providence, and incites our hearts to a greater admiration and fear of His omnipotency." Westfall, Science and Religion, p. 34.

truths"[1] while Jones went even further and claimed that nature ". . . is Christian, and the world itself a daily miracle."[2] Robert Boyle[3] compared the world to the clock at Strasbourg[4]; the laws of nature functioning like the mechanical parts of the clock, and God bearing the same relation -- as creator -- to the world as man did to the clock.[5] Even the simplest thing was held to have a purpose in the divine plan. After all, observed Boyle, were not lambs born in the spring when there is fresh grass for them to eat?[6] Asked Newton in his Optics (1704):

> Whence is it that nature doth nothing in vain; and whence arises all that order and beauty which we see in the world? How came the bodies of animals to be contrived with so much art, and for what ends were their several parts? Was the eye

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[1]Richard Barton, Analogy of Divine Wisdom (1747). Quoted in E. R. Wasserman, "Nature Moralized: The Divine Analogy in the Eighteenth Century," English Literary History (June 1953), p. 60.

[2]Ibid., p. 66.

[3]"Robert Boyle had centered his whole life on Christian practice. Governing his conduct by the strictest puritanical code, he abstained from tobacco, alcohol, excesses in any form. It is reported that he never uttered the name of God without first pausing reverently." Westfall, Science and Religion, p. 41.

[4]Barbour, Issues, p. 40.

[5]Ibid., p. 38.

[6]Ibid., p.38; cf. pp. 45, 46, 62 -- of this paper for discussion of the corporeality of God in the Dialogues.

> contrived without skill in optics? . . . Does it not appear from phenomena, that there is a being incorporeal, living, intelligent . . . .?[1]

The analogy between the order and design in nature and in the productions of man seemed overwhelming. No longer need one be steeped in theological curiosities in order to appreciate the wisdom and power of God -- one had merely to open one's eyes and look about. Again and again the comparison of nature and man-made artifacts was made.

> By nature, I Understand this vast, if not infinite Machin of the universe, the perfect and wise production of almighty God, consisting of an infinite number of lesser machins, every one of which is adjusted by weight and measure.[2]

The argument was impressive and had the support of the most learned men of the day; and it was particularly suited to an age intoxicated with its achievements in the natural sciences. Its use was intended to support, not replace, Christianity, for as Winstanley noted: ". . . the pursuit of all useful knowledge in the arts and sciences is itself almost an act of worship."[3] And as late as 1748 --

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[1] Ibid., p. 38.

[2] Quoted in R. H. Hurlbutt, "Hume and Scientific Theism," Journal of the History of Ideas (Oct. 1956), p. 491. Cheyne, who made the statement, and who was a member of the Royal Society, also justified using analogies in trying to prove God's existence: "Analogy and its Appendages . . . is the only natural Language the Deity can speak to us at present, under our Degeneracy and Lapse." Quoted in Wasserman, Nature, p. 43. Cf. Cleanthes' analogy on Dialogues, p. 143.

[3] Cited in Emerson, Heresy, p. 395.

three years before Hume began composing his Dialogues -- Colin Maclaurin in An Account of Sir Isaac Newton's Philosophical Discoveries eagerly restated the design argument:

> The main argument for the existence of the Deity obvious to all and carrying irresistible conviction with it, is from the evident contrivance and fitness of things for one another, which we meet throughout all parts of the universe. There is no need of nice or subtle reasonings in this matter; a manifest contrivance suggests a contriver. It strikes us like a sensation; and artful reasonings against it may puzzle us, but it is without shaking our belief. No person, for example, that knows the principles of optics and the structure of the eye, can believe that it was formed without skill in that science; or that male and female in animals were not formed for each other, and for continuing the species.[1]

As the eighteenth century wore on, the position of the Deists became more and more inseparable from that of the Scientific Theists of the Royal Society. Both argued that man's natural reason offered the surest foundation for Christianity and both argued that the design in nature afforded the most convincing proof of God's existence and attributes. Theirs was a religion based entirely upon reason; and it was to this Natural Religion and its allegedly invincible protector, the design argument, that Hume addressed himself in the Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion.

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[1] Quoted in Hurlbutt, "Scientific Theism," p. 492. Cf. Cleanthes' analogy in Dialogues, p. 143.

CHAPTER II

THE NATURE OF BELIEF IN HUME'S PHILOSOPHY

Before considering Hume's treatment of Natural Religion in the Dialogues, it would serve us well to examine some general aspects of his epistemology, for his approach to religion was determined through his philosophy as a whole; and this, in turn, was characterized to a large extent by the distinction he made between knowledge and belief.

As we saw in the last chapter, enlightened speculation in the seventeenth and eighteenth century held natural reason to be a force capable of unravelling the mysteries of the universe. Man, standing apart from the rest of creation, carefully analysed the data of experience and derived far-reaching conclusions, moved only, so it seemed, by a passionate longing for knowledge. Hume's position, however, was a more modest one. Man not only acted upon nature, but more importantly nature acted upon man. As Kemp Smith noted:

> His entire philosophy, both theoretical and practical, is built around the view of Nature as having an authority, which man has neither the right nor the power to challenge.[1]

Hume removed reason from the hallowed position of an

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[1]Norman Kemp Smith, The Philosophy of David Hume (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1964), p. 564.

autonomous analytical force, and instead made it subject to the vicissitudes of experience. And our interpretation of the data of experience was not solely the result of the operations of nature but also of man, his culture, and his traditions. As he noted in the Abstract: "It is not, therefore, reason which is the guide of life, but custom . . . ."[1]

The importance of Hume's demotion of reason is readily apparent with regard to Natural Religion. For here was a system of religion, claimed by its adherents to be founded completely upon man's natural reason. And concerning this highly touted ability of reason, Hume's position, as he pointed out in the Enquiry was clear:

> While we cannot give a satisfactory reason, why we believe, after a thousand experiments, that a stone will fall, or fire burn; can we ever satisfy ourselves concerning any determination, which we may form, with regard to the origin of worlds, and the situation of nature, from and to eternity?[2]

In this chapter our concern will be to offer a brief outline of Hume's doctrine of belief in order to show its importance with regard to the role of reason in religion. And we shall see, that because of the myriad causes -- both natural and unnatural -- of our beliefs, Hume recommended a

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[1]David Hume, "An Abstract of a Book Lately Published Entitled A Treatise of Human Nature," in Hume: Theory of Knowledge, edited with an Introduction by D. C. Yalden-Thomson (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1951), p. 254.

[2]David Hume, "Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding," in Enquiries, edited with an Introduction by L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 162.

skeptical attitude towards the claims advanced on behalf of reason. Our reason was simply not capable of reaching out beyond the bounds of our experience. And as it was in the very nature of religious systems to account for what was not empirically experienced then, Hume concluded, reason was certainly not to be our guide in such matters.

> Divinity or Theology as it proves the existence of a Deity, and the immortality of souls, is composed partly of reasoning's concerning particular, partly concerning general facts. It has a foundation in reason, so far as it is supported by experience. But its best and most solid foundation is faith and divine revelation.[1]

In the Enquiry, Hume separates reasoning into two camps:

> All reasonings may be divided into two kinds, namely demonstrative reasoning, that concerning relations of ideas, and moral reasoning, or that concerning matter of fact and existence.[2]

To the first group -- that concerning the relations of ideas -- Hume applies the term 'knowledge'.

> Propositions of this kind are discoverable by the mere operation of thought without dependence on what is anywhere existent in the universe.[3]

As examples of these sorts of propositions he points to the truths of arithmetic, algebra, and geometry. An important

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[1] Ibid., p. 165.

[2] Ibid., p. 35.

[3] Ibid., p. 25.

characteristic shared by these propositions is that their contradictories are inconceivable. Hume separates his two 'kinds' of reasonings absolutely:

> . . . knowledge and probability [matters of fact and existence] are of such contrary and disagreeing natures, that they cannot well run insensibly into each other, and that because they will not divide but must be either entirely present, or entirely absent.[1]

The second kind of reasonings -- those involving matters of fact and existence -- Hume calls 'probable reasonings' or 'beliefs'. The contradictories of these propositions are conceivable; and these propositions of belief are of immediate concern to man's practical life and require the relation of cause and effect.

> All reasonings concerning matter of fact seem to be founded on the relation of Cause and Effect. By means of that relation alone we can go beyond the evidence of our memory and senses.[2]

Before turning to his analysis of causation we must note that Hume offers a further division in this second kind of reason between 'proofs' and 'probabilities'.

> . . . 'twould perhaps be more convenient . . . to distinguish human reason into three kinds, viz that from knowledge, from proofs, and from probabilities. By knowledge, I mean the assurance arising from the comparison of ideas. By proofs, those arguments, which are deriv'd from the relation of cause and

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[1]David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, edited with an Introduction by L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), p. 181.

[2]Hume, Enquiry, p. 26.

> effect, and which are entirely free from doubt and uncertainty. By probability, that evidence which is still attended with uncertainty.[1]

When discussing 'proofs' Hume has in mind such cases as knowing that the sun will rise tomorrow. Our certainty of this claim arises because not only has the sun risen every morning in our experience but also it has never been known not to rise. In the category 'probabilities' Hume places all other propositions that fall short of this degree of certainty, i.e., those in which either our experience is limited in extent or not uniform in its determinations.[2]

Our idea of causal, or necessary, connection arises, according to Hume, in the following way: When we are subject to the constant conjunction in our experience of two objects a 'custom' is causally generated.

> For wherever the repetition of any particular act or operation produces a propensity to renew the same act or operation, without being impelled by any reasoning or process of the understanding, we always say that this propensity is the effect of Custom.[3]

This custom determines the mind, upon the impression of the first object, to form an idea of the second object. As Cavendish notes:

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[1]Hume, Treatise, p. 124.

[2]See Dialogues, p. 144 where Philo discusses this.

[3]Hume, Enquiry, p. 43.

> . . . if an idea is associated with an impression we now have, the idea is naturally called to mind.[1]

This determination of the mind causes a 'feeling' -- an impression of reflection -- to arise. This new feeling of necessitated transition is -- as an impression -- the source to which Hume traces our idea of necessary connection.

> . . . after a frequent repetition, I find, that upon the appearance of one of the objects, the mind is determin'd by custom to consider its usual attendant, and to consider it in a stronger light upon account of its relation to the first object. 'Tis this impression, then, or determination, which affords me the idea of necessity.[2]

We come now to Hume's very important doctrine of belief which he explains in the following way:

> . . . belief is nothing but a more vivid, lively, forcible, firm, steady conception of an object, than what the imagination alone is ever able to attain.[3]

> . . . belief consists not in the peculiar nature or order of ideas, but in the manner of their conception, and in their feeling to the mind.[4]

Basically, we may say that a belief arises when the present conception of an idea is enlivened, almost to the intensity of an impression, through conjunction with either a customarily associated idea of the memory or impression of the senses.[5]

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[1] Cavendish, David Hume, p. 52.

[2] Hume, Treatise, p. 156.

[3] Hume, Enquiry, p. 49.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., p. 50.

> The effect, then, of belief is to raise up a simple idea to an equality with our impressions, and bestow on it a like influence on the passions. This effect it can only have by making an idea approach an impression in force and vivacity.[1]

It is important to note with Hume that ". . . belief is more properly an act of the sensitive, than of the cognitive part of our natures"[2] and this because belief results from custom operating through the agency of feeling.[3] An idea is raised to the status of a belief, not through a chain of reasoning, but because of an association resulting from our previous experience.

> Thus all probable reasoning is nothing but a species of sensation. 'Tis not solely in poetry and music, we must follow our taste and sentiment, but likewise in philosophy. When I am convinc'd of any principle, 'tis only an idea, which strikes more strongly upon me. When I give the preference to one set of arguments above another, I do nothing but decide from my feeling concerning the superiority of their influence. Objects have no discoverable connexion together; nor is it from any other principle but custom operating upon the imagination, that we can draw any inference from the appearance of one to the existence of another.[4]

As we shall see in our discussion of the design argument in Chapter III, this superiority of influence that some arguments have over others, has an important role to play in the determination of one's religious beliefs.

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[1] Hume, Treatise, p. 119.

[2] Ibid., p. 183.

[3] Kemp Smith, Hume, p. 95.

[4] Hume, Treatise, p. 103.

Our beliefs, therefore, are the result of the associations we form during the course of our experience. These associations, in turn, arise in various ways for man is a product both of his natural and his social environment. While natural beliefs are brought about through our observation of, and participation in, the natural world, a great many other beliefs are due to man's involvement in his social milieu and it is the business of the philosopher to scrutinize these. And while natural beliefs are probably unalterable, artificial beliefs resulting from the forces of society, are not. These forces within the social network, such as education, politics, and religion, inculcate various beliefs through the medium of repetition. Such beliefs acquire considerable power in the affairs of man and, because their effects can often be deleterious, a close appraisal of their merit is required.[1] Kemp Smith points out the danger of these prejudicial beliefs:

> Does not every impression, of internal reflexion no less than of the outer senses, in communicating its vivacity to associated ideas, conspire to bring man into subjection to influences which are inconsidered and often malign? And when the influences of the state, of education, and especially of religion, are so directed as to reinforce them, are they not of well-nigh overwhelming power?[2]

The safeguard against such influences was, according

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[1] "Byasses from prejudice, education, passion, party, etc. hang more upon one mind than another." Hume, Enquiry, p. 107.

[2] Kemp Smith, Hume, p. 130.

to Hume, a skeptical attitude. And it was the only safeguard because beliefs could neither be proven nor disproven.

> In general, there is a degree of doubt, and caution, and modesty, which, in all kinds of scrutiny and decision, ought for ever to accompany a just reasoner.[1]

Philosophers, aware of the limitations and imperfections of human faculties, ". . . will never be tempted to go beyond common life."[2] And the very area where speculative beliefs do go beyond common life, is religion. Natural Religion, claiming as it did, to be founded entirely on natural reason was the chief offender of the power of reason. Here, reason was held capable of establishing and supporting, on the basis of the empirical design argument, an entire system of religion. Consequently, in the Dialogues, Hume turned his attention to the role of reason in religion in order to determine exactly how much support Natural Religion could expect from the operation of natural reason. And the conclusion he came to was the same one that he came to in the Enquiry:

> I am the better pleased with the method of reasoning here delivered, as I think it may serve to confound those dangerous friends or disguised enemies to the Christian Religion, who have undertaken to defend it by the principles of human reason. Our most holy religion is founded on faith, not on reason; and it is a sure method of exposing it to put it to such a trial as it is, by no means, fitted to endure.[3]

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[1] Hume, Enquiry, pp. 161-162.

[2] Ibid., p. 162.

[3] Ibid., pp. 130-131.

CHAPTER III

THE MESSAGE OF THE DIALOGUES

> . . . the most cogent presentation of any religious view in eighteenth century English literature.[1]

The Dialogues was published in the Fall of 1779 by Hume's nephew and was reviewed immediately by both the Monthly Review and the Gentleman's Magazine. The former proclaimed that "Philo is the hero of the piece,"[2] while the latter observed that Hume's method in attacking "the moral attributes of the Deity are the same with those which were employed by Lord Bolingbroke."[3]

In 1780, T. Haytor, a fellow of King's College Cambridge published the first book-length study of the Dialogues: Remarks on Mr. Hume's Dialogues, Concerning Natural Religion. Haytor's attitude is one of indignation:

> . . . which person, in the name of common sense, is most worthy of confidence and dependence; the man who is restrained solely by a regard to character and interest: or the man, who in the addition to

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[1] J. V. Price, David Hume (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1968), p. 128.

[2] Cited in Hume, Dialogues, p. 58.

[3] Cited in David Hume, Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, edited with an Introduction by B. M'Ewen (Edinburgh: Wm. Blackwood and Sons, 1907), p. xxxiii.

> the above motives, has the controul likewise of divine vengeance, hanging incessantly like Damocles's sword, over his every procedure?[1]

Like most reviewers of his day, Haytor was less interested in the philosophical merit of the Dialogues than in the implications it held for religion: The Dialogues, simply and beyond doubt, was a scurrilous attack by a noted unbeliever on Christianity.

J. Milner underscored this point a year later when he published his ambitious Gibbon's Account of Christianity Considered: Together With Strictures on Hume: Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion. With regard to Philo's statements in Part XII, Milner lamented that

> The tendency of these passages is still more poisonous, to teach us that what Christianity offers in a future life is not worth the having, and that the belief of it is an enemy to all true virtue . . . .[2]

So shocking did Milner find the Dialogues that, as Price tells us, he "finally concludes that Hume is beyond reach of salvation . . . and he implies that he will be severely dealt with on Judgment Day."[3]

Having relegated Hume to the ever-lasting fires of Hell, little else was said of the Dialogues for the next century, perhaps, as Green and Grose were later to say, because

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[1]T. Haytor, Remarks on Mr. Hume's Dialogues, Concerning Natural Religion (Cambridge: T. Cadel, 1780), p. 40.

[2]Price, David Hume, p. 37.

[3]Ibid., p. 38.

"There seems to be a deep-seated reluctance to discuss such fundamental questions."[1]

In his Introduction to The Natural History of Religion, Hume said:

> As every enquiry, which regards religion, is of the utmost importance, there are two questions in particular, which challenge our attention, to wit, that concerning its foundation in reason, and that concerning its origin in human nature.[2]

In the History, Hume deals with the latter question and in the Dialogues, he deals with the former.

The Dialogues covers a good deal of ground, much of which this paper will not be dealing with. Let us therefore draw the boundaries of this enquiry. We shall be concerned in this paper exclusively with the discussion of the design argument, and its bearing on Natural Religion, for it was this argument that provided its chief support in the eighteenth century.[3] It is important to remember that our discussion of Natural Religion concerns "its foundation in reason" and that, with the exception of Demea, this reason is 'natural reason' or reason founded on 'nature' or 'experience'.

This chapter is divided into three sections. In the

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[1]Cited in Hume, Dialogues, M'Ewen, ed., p. xiv.

[2]David Hume, The Natural History of Religion, edited with an Introduction by H. E. Root (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967), p. 21.

[3]This means that we shall be dealing primarily with Parts II -- VIII and XII.

first we shall be discussing Cleanthes' design argument with an eye to its nature and special features. In the second section we examine the criticisms Philo makes of the argument. Finally, in the third section we review the final positions of Philo and Cleanthes and take particular note of Philo's conclusions regarding the relation of the design argument to Natural Religion.

Cleanthes' Argument

Cleanthes' design argument has, as its purpose, the establishment of a system of religion; specifically Natural Religion, as this is established by reason. It proceeds firstly by comparing the purposeful order in nature with the purposeful order in machines of human contrivance. So far as the latter is due to an external cause -- intelligence -- so far, then, must the former be due to an external cause -- intelligence. Intelligence is an aspect of mind; the only mind of which we have experience is the human mind; therefore the divine mind must resemble it in kind, although differing in degree. Given this partial understanding of the divine mind, it was assumed by the proponents of Natural Religion, that one could reasonably come to an appreciation of man's place in nature and the duties that might be expected of him. The body of knowledge thereby attained was known as Natural Religion.

Cleanthes states his design argument for the first

time in Part II:

> Look round the world: Contemplate the whole and every part of it: You will find it to be nothing but one great machine, subdivided into an infinite number of lesser machines, which again admit of subdivisions, to a degree beyond what human senses and faculties can trace and explain. All these various machines, and even their most minute parts, are adjusted to each other with an accuracy, which ravishes into admiration all men, who have ever contemplated them. The curious adapting of means to ends, throughout all nature, resembles exactly, though it much exceeds, the productions of human contrivance; of human design, thought, wisdom, and intelligence. Since therefore the effects resemble each other, we are led to infer, by all the rules of analogy, that the causes also resemble; and that the Author of nature is somewhat similar to the mind of man; though possessed of much larger faculties, proportioned to the grandeur of the work, which he has executed. By this argument <u>a posteriori</u>, and by this argument alone, we do prove at once the existence of a Deity, and his similarity to human mind and intelligence.[1]

At various points during the course of the <u>Dialogues</u> Cleanthes restates and clarifies aspects of this argument.[2] With these changes in mind his argument can be formulated in four steps:

1 - Machines and Natural Systems[3] exhibit a "self-evident and undeniable" similarity with regard to the fact that both show a "curious adapting of means to ends."

2 - Experience shows that to the extent that effects resemble so will their causes.

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[1] Hume, <u>Dialogues</u>, p. 143.

[2] See also pp. 144-145, Philo's statement of it: p. 146, and pp. 152, 154, 163, 216.

[3] The use of this term is explained on p. 40 of this paper.

3 - The cause of the order in machines is intelligence.

4 - Therefore, the cause of order in natural systems is intelligence "proportioned to the grandeur of the work."

There are several things to note about Step One, the first of which concerns the terms Cleanthes uses when comparing the productions of man to nature. In his introduction to the Dialogues, Kemp Smith points out "the ambiguity of such terms as 'design', 'final cause', 'contrivance', 'adjustment', 'order'."[1] Indeed this ambiguity of expression runs right through the discussion.

In "Hume and Scientific Theism", Hurlbutt observes, concerning the design argument, that "it is possible to discriminate two basic points of departure."[2] If, when referring to order in nature, one means to signify the adjustment of parts or their structure, then one is using what is called the 'argument from design'. In this variation, order is held to imply intelligence. The other variation, known as the 'argument to design' adds a further qualification: order, if it is to imply intelligence, must refer not only to structure and adjustment but to purposeful adjustment. Using a machine as an example, if one referred to its structure and the adjustment of its parts in order to compare it to nature,

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[1] Hume, Dialogues, p. 72.

[2] Hurlbutt, "Hume and Scientific Theism", p. 488.

one would be arguing from design; whereas if one were to argue in addition that both machines and nature are so ordered that they may achieve a purpose one would be arguing to design. In this latter case it is held that the order and adjustment is a necessary requirement for the purposeful functioning of the machine and that such purposeful ordering is a by-product only of intelligence. As regards Cleanthes' use of machine, Hurlbutt rightly notes that it "is apparent that often the two approaches are run together."[1] Though this is true, it is also the case that Cleanthes relies most heavily on the argument to design and it is this formulation that we will deal with in our discussion of what we shall hereafter refer to simply as Cleanthes' design argument.

Having established that Cleanthes' argument concerns purposeful order we need to point out a further feature: purposeful order exists both between the parts of an organism so far as they conspire to the functioning of the whole and between whole organisms so far as they also conspire towards mutual ends. For example, the adjustment of the parts of an eye conspires to producing sight and the interrelationship of the eye and other bodily organs, to human achievement. In his argument, Cleanthes makes use of both these senses of adjustment. For simplicity I have used the term 'natural systems' which is used to refer to either sense.

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[1] Ibid., p. 489.

There is a further aspect of Cleanthes' argument that is often ignored, but has important ramifications. In discussing the purpose that machines fulfil, Cleanthes seems at times to have in mind a particular kind of machine; namely a dynamic sort. For instance, both a trowel and a speedometer are machines, in the larger sense, in which the specific adjustment of their parts is requisite to the achieving of their respective ends. They are machines designed to fulfil a purpose. Natural systems, however, are not static in the sense in which a trowel is, they are dynamic like a speedometer and it seems that it is the latter sort of machine that Cleanthes is wont to compare with natural systems. The importance in recognizing this distinction lies in the fact that both machines -- such as speedometers -- and natural systems have an internal dynamic principle of order. For example, the parts of a speedometer can interact with each other whereas the parts of a trowel cannot. Although Cleanthes does in fact use in his various analogies both sorts of notions of a machine the strongest form of his argument would be that comparing dynamic machines to natural systems and it is this formulation that we shall follow.

Now that we know what Cleanthes is comparing and how, we come to a most intriguing aspect of his argument. At the end of Part II Philo demands of Cleanthes that he "show any such similarity between the fabric of a house, and the

generation of a universe."[1] Cleanthes retorts simply that "this similarity is self-evident and undeniable",[2] and later clarifies why this is so.

> Consider, anatomize the eye: Survey its structure and contrivance; and tell me, from your own feeling, if the idea of a contriver does not immediately flow in upon you with a force like that of sensation.[3]

And, if Philo does not happen to approve of the logic of his argument, Cleanthes suggests that he consider the following point:

> Some beauties in writing we may meet with, which seem contrary to rules, and which gain the affections, and animate the imagination, in opposition to all the precepts of criticism, and to the authority of the established masters of art. And if the argument for theism be, as you pretend, contradictory to the principles of logic: its universal, its irresistible influence proves clearly, that there may be arguments of a like irregular nature. Whatever cavils may be urged; an orderly world, . . . will still be received as an incontestable proof of design and intention.[4]

Hurlbutt suggests that these passages are borrowed from Colin Maclaurin who said, in An Account of Sir Isaac Newton's Philosophical Discoveries (1748), with regard to the design argument:

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[1] Hume, Dialogues, p. 151.

[2] Ibid., p. 152.

[3] Ibid., p. 154.

[4] Ibid., p. 155.

> There is no need of nice or subtle reasonings in this matter; a manifest contrivance suggests a contriver. It strikes us like a sensation; and artful reasonings against it may puzzle us, but it is without shaking our belief.[1]

Whether or not Cleanthes' speech is patterned on Maclaurin's, we do know that Hume was concerned with this aspect of the argument. He writes to Elliot about it in 1751:

> I coud wish that Cleanthes' Argument could be so analys'd as to be render'd quite formal and regular. The Propensity of the Mind towards it, unless that Propensity were as strong and universal as that to believe in our Senses and Experience, will still, I am afraid, be esteem'd a suspicious Foundation.[2]

He adds:

> . . . the other Dissimilitudes do not weaken the Argument. And indeed it woud seem from experience and Feeling, that they do not weaken it so much as we might naturally expect.[3]

These passages suggest that this aspect of the design argument was an important one to Hume. We shall see in Part XII of the Dialogues just what role this "Propensity of the Mind" plays.

We come now to the second step of the argument, that experience shows that to the extent that effects resemble so will their causes. This is the particular formulation of analogical reasoning that Cleanthes is using in his argument. The Oxford English Dictionary defines analogy as:

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[1] Quoted by Hurlbutt, "Scientific Theism", p. 492; cf. p. 23.

[2] Hume, Letters, I: p. 155.

[3] Ibid., p. 157.

> . . . a name for the fact, that, the relations borne to any object by some attribute or circumstance, corresponds to the relation existing between another object and some attribute or circumstance pertaining to it.

In the case we are considering, the objects being compared are dynamic machines and natural systems and the circumstances pertaining to each is the cause of its dynamism. It should further be noted that our assurance of this analogical reasoning is based upon experience. That the order in nature is an effect and must thereby have a cause is not argued, but assumed, for as Philo notes early in Part II: "Nothing exists without a cause."[1]

When we come to Step Three, we must bear in mind that our knowledge that purposeful order -- in this case, the purposeful order evident in machines -- proceeds from intelligence is also experientially based. As Philo, when reformulating Cleanthes' argument, points out: "By experience we find . . . that there is an original principle of order in mind, not in matter."[2] The point of the design argument is to establish this claim, by analogy, not to assume that purposeful order necessarily implies intelligence.[3]

There is a putative confusion which arises at this point in the argument concerning the 'cause' of order, be it in machines or natural systems. Nathan, in a clever article

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[1] Hume, Dialogues, p. 142.

[2] Ibid., p. 146.

[3] See Philo's remark to Demea, p. 179.

entitled "Hume's Immanent God", puts it this way:

> The order of a thing can be explained either by a principle within itself or by a principle external to it. It is impossible that an object's order be explained both ways since this would entail that a principle both did and did not explain the order . . . . We see from experience that the universe has internal principles of order. Therefore, it is impossible that it can also have an external principle of order.[1]

Nathan's intention here is to short-circuit Cleanthes' argument. As he later puts it, the design argument must prove not only that there is order in the universe but that its cause is external, which, claims Nathan, Philo shows to be impossible.

However, Nathan notwithstanding, Cleanthes does not have to prove that the cause of natural order is external. If we accept the comparison of dynamic machines to natural systems, and if we agree that these machines owe their dynamism to an intelligence external to them (in this case, human beings) then analogously so do natural systems owe their dynamism to an external intelligence.

Nathan's demand would have bearing if the comparison were between static organisms, but, as we have already pointed out, it is not. The principle of internal order both in machines and natural systems is taken for granted; it is what makes each a dynamic rather than a static organism.

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[1] G. J. Nathan, "Hume's Immanent God," in Hume, edited by V. C. Chappell (New York: Anchor Books, 1966), p. 413.

A self-ordering principle is what distinguishes a machine like a speedometer from a machine like a trowel. So long as the analogy concerns things which contain self-ordering principles as an intrinsic feature, it is perfectly justifiable to enquire into the cause of this self-ordering, which is what Cleanthes is doing. To grant Cleanthes this point is not to grant that his argument as a whole succeeds in establishing what he wishes it to, it is only to grant that he has an analogy. The intrinsic merit of his analogy, in contrast with others that may be suggested, is a different matter and one that Philo later draws attention to[1]: but Philo does not deny that Cleanthes has an analogy. Consequently, what is at issue is what makes a machine self-ordering.

A final point to note with regard to Step Three is that experience teaches us not one but two things about the cause of machines. They are brought about not only by human intelligence but by human handiwork as well and both are necessary. This aspect was traditionally overlooked by 18th century proponents of the design argument but, as we shall see, not by Philo.[2]

We come now to Step Four, the conclusion of the argument, which Cleanthes claims is that the cause of natural systems is divine intelligence, which is an external, mental

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[1] See Parts VI - VIII of the Dialogues.

[2] See Dialogues, pp. 171, 186.

cause. As just noted the argument ignores the physical agency involved in human productions and consequently Cleanthes' God does not have a physical being. However, Cleanthes does correlate 'intelligence' with 'mind' and claims that his argument proves a divine mind -- this far he is immediately willing to go in specifying his conclusion. Philo, we shall see, is willing to go much further, and it is to his criticism of the design argument that we now turn.

Philo's Criticisms of the Argument

Philo's aim in Parts II -- VIII is to weaken the design argument as much as he can. Towards this end he devised two tactics: one was to show that the design argument established precious little about the deity -- certainly far less than what Cleanthes claimed it did; and the other was to show that natural phenomena -- upon which Cleanthes' argument was based -- could be used to support equally plausible analogies that led to conclusions other than Cleanthes'. From his examination Philo drew the conclusion that Cleanthes' system was no better than any other because all "are subject to great and insuperable difficulties", with the result that the best attitude to take on such matters is a "total suspense of judgment".[1]

In his first criticism, Philo has in mind to reveal

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[1]Ibid., p. 186.

the weaknesses of the design argument. In particular he wants to examine Cleanthes' notion of God.

Cleanthes, as we have seen, correlates 'intelligence' with 'mind' at the conclusion of his argument; and mind, which he points out to Philo, must be mind like the human for "I know of no other."[1] Once again, experience is to be our guide.

There is no disagreement between Cleanthes and Philo at any point in the Dialogues that the universe exhibits order. And they both agree that its cause may be called "Wisdom, thought, design, knowledge."[2] But Philo, while willing to invoke these encomiums "because these words are honourable among men",[3] adds an important qualification.

> . . . let us beware, lest we think that our ideas any wise correspond to his perfections, or that his attributes have any resemblance to these qualities among men.[4]

Cleanthes, however, will not accept this qualification.

> . . . if our ideas, so far as they go, be not just and adequate, and correspondent to his real nature, I know not what there is in this subject worth insisting on. Is the name, without any meaning, of such mighty importance?

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[1] Ibid., p. 166.

[2] Ibid., p. 142.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., p. 158.

In order to give his God some significance Cleanthes insists that the analogy between the human and the divine mind must be adhered to and to this end he defines mind. And, as well, Cleanthes goes on to point out:

> A mind, whose acts and sentiments and ideas are not distinct and successive; one, that is wholly simple, and totally immutable; is a mind which has no thought, no reason, no will, no sentiment, no love, no hatred; or in a word, is no mind at all. It is an abuse of terms to give it that appellation . . . .[1]

In Part Four, Philo takes a narrow interpretation of mind. This being the case, Philo determines that he

> . . . shall prove, that there is no ground to suppose a plan of the world to be formed in the divine mind, consisting of distinct ideas, differently arranged . . . .[2]

He begins by noting that experience teaches that if order requires a cause, then it requires a cause whether the order is physical -- as in animals or vegetables -- or mental -- as in the ideas in our minds. In neither case do we know how the cause operates, we only know its effects, i.e., the order it creates. And if we are unable to understand cause, Philo asks Cleanthes, "what do we gain by your system, in tracing the universe of objects into a similar universe of ideas?"[3]

> An ideal system, arranged of itself, without a precedent design, it [sic] not a whit more explicable than a material one, which attains its order in a like manner.[4]

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[1] Ibid., p. 159.

[2] Ibid., p. 160.

[3] Ibid., p. 162.

[4] Ibid., p. 164.

Philo's point is that while Cleanthes may very well use his argument in order to hypothesize a divine mind, that conclusion is an empty one.

> Naturalists . . . never surely thought it satisfactory to explain a particular effect [physical order] by a particular cause [mental order], which was no more to be accounted for than the effect itself.[1]

And if this is so -- that we cannot understand the causes of physical or mental order -- why "look beyond the present material world. By supposing it to contain the principle of its order within itself, we really assert it to be God."[2]

Philo will return later in the discussion to the importance of this point about the unknowability of causes,[3] but for the moment he is content with letting Cleanthes have the last word.

> You ask me, what is the cause of this cause? I know not; I care not; that concerns not me. I have found a Deity; and here I stop my enquiry.[4]

In Part IV, Philo has shown Cleanthes that while, on the basis of his analogy, he may claim that mind is the cause of natural order, he has not succeeded in adding anything to our knowledge of this 'mind'. It still remains just a "name without any meaning." So in Part V, Philo explores the other

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., p. 162.

[3] See Dialogues, p. 178.

[4] Ibid., p. 163.

way in which Cleanthes has suggested we might come to understand the divine mind and resolves to show him "still more inconveniences . . . in [his] anthropomorphism."[1]

Now while we may know nothing of how mental causation works, Cleanthes' analogy claims that the divine mind resembles human mind, indeed "the liker the better."[2] This being Cleanthes' claim, Philo decides to elicit a few comparisons, based upon what we know by experience of the human mind, and warns Cleanthes to "mark the consequences."[3] Among the consequences Philo derives about the divinity, based upon our experience of human minds, are that the deity must be finite, imperfect, mortal, corporeal, etc. In fact, for all we know, this world might be "the first rude essay of some infant Deity, who afterwards abandoned it, ashamed of his lame performance"[4] or it could be the "production of old age and dotage in some superannuated Deity."[5]

Philo has very cleverly put Cleanthes in a trap. If Cleanthes disowns the gross anthropomorphic comparisons that Philo is suggesting then he can only do so by claiming that the divine mind is <u>not</u> very like the human. The consequence

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[1] Ibid., p. 165.

[2] Ibid., p. 166.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., p. 169.

[5] Ibid.

of making this move is to weaken the strength of his design argument to the point where he can claim not much more than some remote similarity between the human and the divine mind to the extent that both exhibit intelligence. And if this is all that he is left with then his argument will hardly prove sufficient to support Natural Religion.

On the other hand, if Cleanthes stresses the similarity between the minds, as he already has, then he is powerless to stop Philo's comparisons; with the result that his Deity is grossly anthropomorphic and part of a "wild and unsettled . . . system of theology."[1] Again, hardly a comfort to the proponents of Natural Religion.

Consequently, with regard to Cleanthes' design argument, Philo concludes at the end of Part V that:

> In a word, Cleanthes, a man, who follows your hypothesis, is able perhaps, to assert, or conjecture, that the universe, sometime, arose from something like design: But beyond that position he cannot ascertain one single circumstance, and is left afterwards to fix every point of his theology, by the utmost licence of fancy and hypothesis.[2]

Although he does not answer Philo's criticisms, Cleanthes still retains hope for his design argument as being the only possible way to account for natural order.

> I see, that, by the utmost indulgence of your imagination, you never get rid of the hypothesis

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., pp. 168-169.

> of design in the universe[1]; but are obliged, at every turn, to have recourse to it. To this concession I adhere steadily; and this I regard as a sufficient foundation for religion.[2]

The success of Philo's criticism to this point lies in his having established that the design argument is incapable of reasonable extension -- that is, extension based upon experience. Any attempt at extension is the business of fancy, not reason, and then of course anything goes. So far Philo has been content to grant Cleanthes his argument and has merely marked the consequences. Now, however, he shall turn his attention to the analogy which Cleanthes has based his argument on with the intention of getting "rid of the hypothesis of design in the universe." And this he does by offering an alternative analogy "no less certain, and derived from the same source of experience."[3]

At the beginning of Part VI Philo draws his own analogy, based upon our observance of purposeful order in nature. It parallels, exactly, Cleanthes' argument.

> 1 - So far as we are able to see, the universe bears "a great resemblance" to an animal: ". . . a like principle of life and motion. A continual circulation of matter in it produces no disorder: A continual waste in every part is incessantly repaired: The closest sympathy is

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[1]Cleanthes is referring to his hypothesis that the "design in the universe" is due to his God -- an external, mental, orderer.

[2]Hume, Dialogues, p. 169.

[3]Ibid., p. 170.

perceived throughout the entire system: And each part or member, in performing its proper offices, operates both to its own preservation and to that of the whole."[1]

2 - Experience shows "that where several known circumstances are observed to be similar, the unknown will also be found similar."[2]

3 - The cause of the order in animals is a soul "actuating it and actuated by it."[3]

4 - Therefore, the cause of the order in the universe is a soul.

Philo, on the basis of this analogy has got rid of "the hypothesis of design". The external mental God of Cleanthes' analogy has been replaced with an internal mental God -- a soul. Philo points out that his argument is of the same sort as Cleanthes: "What we see in the parts, we may infer in the whole; at least, that is the method of reasoning on which you rest your whole theory"; and there might just as well be an "inherent principle of order to the world" as any other.[4]

In Part VII Demea objects vehemently to Philo's "wild, arbitrary suppositions"[5] and asks: "What data have

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[1] Ibid., pp. 170-171.

[2] Ibid., p. 170.

[3] Ibid., p. 171.

[4] Ibid., p. 174.

[5] Ibid., p. 177.

you for such extraordinary conclusions?"[1] This gives Philo the chance to drive home the point he made first in Part II[2]

> This is the topic on which I have all along insisted. I have still asserted, that we have no data to establish any system of cosmogony. Our experience, so imperfect in itself, and so limited both in extent and duration, can afford us no probable conjecture concerning the whole of things.[3]

Bearing this in mind, then, all systems are equal, in the sense that they are all equally problematical. And, more importantly, all these terms we use to refer to principles, or causes, of order are also unknown in their essence:

> . . . Reason, in its internal fabric and structure, is really as little known to us as instinct or vegetation . . . . The effects of these principles are all known to us from experience: But the principles themselves, and their manner of operation are totally unknown . . . .[4]

So, not only is it arbitrary what analogy we draw from our observance of nature, but it is also arbitrary which cause we assign for the order of nature as we are equally ignorant of all causes. So Cleanthes' analogy has no inherent advantages over any other and it would be "begging the question"[5] to assume that ultimately the cause of, say, animal order was intelligence, for that is the point that Cleanthes

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., pp. 147-149.

[3] Ibid., p. 177. (Emphasis mine).

[4] Ibid., p. 178.

[5] Ibid., p. 179.

must prove. And, if experience is to be our guide, "generation has some privileges above reason: For we see every day the latter arise from the former, never the former from the latter."[1]

Philo concludes Part VII by noting that there is also no difficulty in suggesting that order might be spun from the belly of a spider.[2] It should be noted that in this case the cause of natural order is an external physical one. And if this is not shocking enough a supposition why not, says Philo, in Part VIII suppose "the beginning of motion in matter itself" as the Epicureans did, and end up with an internal physical cause?[3]

There has begun in the last decade a movement towards a new view of the nature of Hume's Dialogues. G. J. Nathan may, I believe, be credited with initiating it, and recently M. Andic has also argued persuasively in support of Nathan. Nathan claims that "Hume's God is immanent in the world as its structuring force and not transcendent to it as a designer"[4]; therefore "Philo is defending the principle of an internal cause of order in the universe."[5] Andic puts the

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[1] Ibid., pp. 179-180.

[2] Ibid., p. 180.

[3] Ibid., p. 183.

[4] Nathan, "Hume's Immanent God", p. 421.

[5] Ibid., p. 412.

thesis a different way:

> The substantive issue between Cleanthes and Philo is surely this: Does nature work like a machine, or like a craftsman?[1]

Although neither Nathan nor Andic use the term, they are suggesting that Hume (who they identify with Philo) is arguing for Pantheism, and that the Dialogues, therefore, is, as well as being critical of the design argument and Natural Religion, positively suggesting an alternative system.

Nathan supports his thesis by quoting a lengthy passage from Part VI where Philo states that of all systems he thinks that the most plausible is one that would ascribe "an eternal, inherent principle of order to the world." But Philo prefaces this remark by saying that he "never willingly" would "defend any particular system of this nature."[2] This is the only part of the passage that Nathan omits publishing. It is difficult to suppose Philo arguing for Pantheism when he expressly declares himself unwilling to defend the position. Besides this, immediately after the passage quoted by Nathan, Philo concludes that "All these systems" are "on a like footing" and none "has any advantage over the others."[3] Again, a strange remark to make, if one is claiming that one system is

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[1] M. Andic, "'Experimental Theism' and the Verbal Dispute in Hume's Dialogues," Archiv Fur Geschichte der Philosophie (Vol. 56, 1974): 245.

[2] Hume, Dialogues, p. 174.

[3] Ibid., p. 175.

superior to the rest.

When Philo makes the analogy to an internal cause of natural order, it is not for the purpose of suggesting that his is a better way of accounting for natural order, but rather that it is just as good a way as Cleanthes'. And Philo does not just juxtapose external and internal causes of order, he also juxtaposes mental and physical causes.

Philo is driving at the following: All analogies proceed by noting a similarity between the two things to be compared. The choice of what to compare is an arbitrary one. The body of natural phenomena remains the same, though different cultures and different individuals have chosen to see nature in different ways. The choice of analogy determines the nature of the cause of order one arrives at, and the Dialogues deals with four basic sorts. Cleanthes' analogy leads to an external mental source of order; Philo's parallel analogy leads to an internal mental source of order (Part VI); the spider analogy (Part VII) leads to an external physical source of order; and, finally, the Epicurean hypothesis (Part VIII) leads to an internal physical source of order.

Philo's intention in suggesting these various hypotheses is not so that he may claim that his analogies are superior -- remember, Cleanthes had chastized him at the end of Part V for not being able to avoid the "design hypothesis" which leads to an external mental cause of natural order. Philo is advancing equally feasible hypotheses; and they are

equally feasible, he is maintaining, because of the very nature of them -- they are all analogies with only partial support in experience. If you begin your argument by comparing the world to a machine you unavoidably conclude with an external mental source of order. But, by the same token, if you begin by comparing the world to an animal, you equally unavoidably conclude with an internal mental source of order.

If we ask experience to judge in favour of one over the other, we find her silent. Nature provides many 'causes' of order, all of which are, in themselves, unknown and none of which has a superiority over any other. All the causes operate only in a part of nature and experience provides no justification for concluding that one must be the cause of all.

By suggesting his various theories, Philo has driven home the points he initially made in Part II; namely that one's choice of analogy is arbitrary, all analogies of this sort are partially, but no more, supported by experience because they all argue from a part of nature to the whole[1]; and experience, because it cannot explain the various principles of order in their "internal fabric and structure,"[2] cannot decide between them as to which is the primary cause of order in nature. The conclusion to be drawn from all of

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[1] Ibid., pp. 147-148.

[2] Ibid., p. 178.

this is not that "Philo is defending the principle of an internal cause of order in the universe" but rather the conclusion that Philo himself clearly draws:

> All these systems, then, of scepticism, polytheism, and theism, you must allow, on your principles, to be on a like footing, and that no one of them has any advantages over the others.[1]

> All religious systems, it is confessed, are subject to great and insuperable difficulties . . . . A total suspense of judgment is here our only reasonable resource.[2]

Let us now put together Philo's two criticisms. He began by clarifying the nature of Cleanthes' argument and concluded that it was not what he called "an argument from experience"[3] but was rather an analogy which was based on our experience. He went on to show that while the analogy could be drawn without too much difficulty, it was difficult to see what it specified about 'the divine mind'. He pointed out that while Cleanthes was free to claim as many characteristics as he wished about the Deity, these were due to the operation "of fancy and hypothesis" and not reason, because experience offered no insight in this matter. Consequently, so far as natural reason was concerned, the ultimate verdict of the design argument was "that the universe, sometime, arose from something like design." And no more!

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[1] Ibid., p. 175.

[2] Ibid., pp. 186-187.

[3] Ibid., p. 149.

Philo's criticism to this point left open the possibility, however, that the design argument might be the only way of accounting for natural order. Indeed Cleanthes was quick to claim this pyrrhic victory: ". . . I see, that, by the utmost indulgence of your imagination, you never get rid of the hypothesis of design in the universe."[1] Consequently, Philo added a second criticism. Cleanthes based his analogy upon the experience we have of intelligence as a cause of order. But, Philo showed, there are many causes of order revealed by our experience and we might just as well build an analogy on these and thereby rid ourselves of the "hypothesis of design." And because we do not understand the 'essence' of any of these causes, we cannot show that one has any inherent superiority over any other. In fact, all these causes suffer a similar disadvantage, in that experience shows their operation to occur only in a part of nature and the analogies seek to account for all of nature. The lesson to be drawn from our investigation is not that one 'system' is any better than any other but that all systems "are subject to great and insuperable difficulties."

Philo's criticisms, then, amount to a two-fold blow on Cleanthes' argument: not only is his argument merely one of many, all of which may claim equal, but faint, support from experience, but also his argument does not establish any

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[1] Ibid., p. 169.

system of religion at all.

Before moving on to a consideration of Philo's final remarks in Part XII, we might take notice of two final comments Philo makes in Part VIII with regard to Cleanthes' anthropomorphic argument. Firstly, he notes that experience shows that ideas in the human mind are copied from objects, whereas in Cleanthes' analogy he reverses this fact by claiming that divine ideas precede natural objects.[1] However, so far as we are concerned with the 'ordering' of objects this point is irrelevant: it would only be relevant if we were discussing the 'creation' of objects. Philo's second criticism is more to the point and it is one we noted when discussing Step Three of Cleanthes' argument.

> In all instances which we have ever seen, thought has no influence upon matter, except where that matter is so conjoined with it . . . Your theory implies a contradiction to this experience.[2]

Philo's final point with regard to all systems based upon natural reason is that a "total suspense of judgment is here our only reasonable resource." Let us now turn to Part XII where Philo draws his various points together and renders a judgment on Natural Religion.

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[1] Ibid., p. 186.

[2] Ibid.

Conclusions on Natural Religion

Part XII marks the final stage in the discussion between Philo and Cleanthes. They have discussed fully the design argument [Parts II -- VIII]; they considered and rejected Demea's a priori argument for God [Part IX]; and finally they discussed the moral aspects of the Deity [Parts X and XI]. They are now ready to give their final comments on Natural Religion. Once again, let us bear in mind that Natural Religion was a system of religion resting upon the design argument. Therefore, its exponents claimed it was the only system of religion that was supported entirely by natural reason; that is, reasoning that is based entirely upon our experience of natural phenomena.

Cleanthes, the expositor of Natural Religion, has been arguing throughout that religion is to be founded on our natural reason. He noted with approval Locke's position:

> Locke seems to have been the first Christian, who ventured openly to assert, that faith was nothing but a species of reason, that religion was only a branch of philosophy, and that a chain of arguments, similar to that which established any truth in morals, politics, or physics, was always employed in discovering all the principles of theology, natural and revealed.[1]

While Cleanthes was arguing that reason supported faith in religion, Philo was arguing in the opposite direction: reason led to agnosticism not to faith. Faith was a

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[1] Ibid., p. 138.

different matter altogether. And Cleanthes himself noted Philo's position early in the discussion for as he said to Philo: "You propose then . . . to erect religious faith on philosophical scepticism . . . ."[1]

In Part XII, we receive the final opinions of Philo and Cleanthes on this larger issue of the role of reason in religion. In particular, and in accordance with the subject of the Dialogues, we shall be looking for the final conclusions on the design argument and Natural Religion.

Cleanthes' final position with regard to Natural Religion and its prop, the design argument, has not changed. In spite of the many criticisms Philo has levelled at his theory, Cleanthes is still convinced that it

> . . . is the only system of cosmogony which can be rendered intelligible and complete, and yet can throughout preserve a strong analogy to what we every day see and experience in the world.[2]

It is, he says, "supported by strong and obvious reason, by natural propensity, and by early education."[3]

Philo's final position, because it covers a great deal more ground, is not as straightforward as Cleanthes' but, as we shall see, it, too, is essentially unchanged.

Philo's opening comments in Part XII have puzzled

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[1] Ibid., p. 132.

[2] Ibid., p. 216.

[3] Ibid.

many critics, for he says of himself that

> . . . no one has a deeper sense of religion impressed on his mind, or pays more profound adoration to the divine Being, as he discovers himself to reason, in the inexplicable contrivance and artifice of nature. A purpose, an intention, or design strikes everywhere the most careless, the most stupid thinker . . . .[1]

T. E. Jessop found this and other speeches of Philo's in Part XII so mystifying that he ignored this entire section of the Dialogues claiming that it was "disconnected from the argued content" of the rest of the work.[2] Kemp Smith claims that Philo is here making a "confession of faith"[3] and elsewhere states that such "conventionally prescribed avowal[s]"[4] were necessary considering the highly religious climate of the age.

It is not, however, necessary to go to such extreme lengths to understand this passage. Philo has said no more in this statement than that he too is impressed with the purposeful order evident in nature. But then, this should not be surprising for nowhere in the Dialogues has he denied this point. That nature evidences such order was the basis not only for Cleanthes' analogy, it was also the basis for all the analogies that Philo himself suggested. Philo has not, in the course of his discussion with Cleanthes, at any

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[1] Ibid., p. 214.

[2] T. E. Jessop, "Symposium: The Present-Day Relevance of Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion," Aristotelian Society Supplementary (Vols. 17-18, 1939): 220.

[3] Hume, Dialogues, p. 70.

[4] Ibid., p. 123.

point, denied that the universe possesses order -- this was necessarily taken for granted as the basis of all their analogies.

What has been at issue throughout the Dialogues is whether or not we can explain, in any reasonable way, the cause of this order. And Philo has not changed his position on this point: he still claims that the "contrivance and artifice of nature" is "inexplicable."[1] To see nature as ordered is not the same as to understand the cause of that order; and Cleanthes' argument has not succeeded in informing us about this in any significant manner.

Consequently, in consideration of this latter point, Philo turns his attention for the final time to the conclusions of the design argument that Cleanthes draws. "If we argue at all" about Cleanthes' analogy then indeed the analogy will lead us to a Deity; and this Deity will be the cause of natural order.[2] But beyond this rather insignificant result nothing more can be specified, "and if we make it a question, whether . . . we can properly call him a mind or intelligence . . . what is this but a mere verbal controversy?"[3] Call him a 'God', 'Deity', 'mind', 'intelligence',

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[1] Ibid., p. 214.

[2] Ibid., p. 217.

[3] Ibid.

'thought' or what you will, but you will learn nothing more of his nature by doing so. And we cannot know more about his nature because we "have no experience of divine attributes and operations"[1]; and therefore, because we cannot specify the terms we use in describing him it is impossible to determine how far, or even whether, his attributes resemble their human counterparts.

It is important to note here that this is not a new observation by Philo; he had already mentioned it in Part II:

> Wisdom, thought, design, knowledge; these we justly ascribe to him; because these words are honourable among men, and we have no other language or conceptions, by which we can express our adoration of him. But let us beware, lest we think, that our ideas any wise correspond to his perfections, or that his attributes have any resemblance to these qualities among men. He is infinitely superior to our limited view and comprehension; and is more the object of worship in the temple than of disputation in the schools.[2]

And after examining Cleanthes' argument, he noted carefully just what it did, and what it did not establish.

> In a word, Cleanthes, a man, who follows your hypothesis, is able, perhaps, to assert, or conjecture, that the universe, sometime, arose from something like design: But beyond that position he cannot ascertain one single circumstance, and is left afterwards to fix every point of his theology, by the utmost license of fancy and hypothesis.[3]

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[1] Ibid., p. 143. (Emphasis mine).

[2] Ibid., p. 142. (Emphasis mine). See also p. 48 of this paper.

[3] Ibid., pp. 168-169. See pp. 52, 61 of this paper.

Philo's charge, then, of 'verbal dispute' in Part XII is neither a new one nor is it the key to the meaning of the whole Dialogues.[1] It is, however, an essential part of Philo's argument in his attempt to discern just how far natural reason can lead us in religious discussions. And as such, it forms the mid-way point in what Philo is after. Yes, natural reason if expressed in the form of the design argument does point to a cause of order in nature, and that cause we call, among other things, intelligence, or God. But No, natural reason cannot tell us any more about the nature of this cause, and it certainly cannot establish a "system of cosmogony."

What then may we say, finally, of Natural Religion?

> If the whole of natural theology . . . resolves itself into one simple, though somewhat ambiguous, at least undefined proposition, that the cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence . . . what can the most inquisitive, contemplative, and religious man do more than give a plain, philosophical assent to the proposition, as often as it occurs . . . .[2]

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[1] James Duerlinger, in "The Verbal Dispute in Hume's Dialogues," Archiv fur Geschichte der Philosophie (Vol. 53, 1971): 22-34, makes much of the verbal issue. Duerlinger claims, on the basis of a stupefying analysis of the verbal dispute, that the Dialogues is much more "than an attempt to discredit the design argument" (32); it is rather, an attempt to show "what is established by reason" (34). If we then ask What is established? we are told that "The Dialogues, do not give reason's direct answer" (33). The trouble with analyses like Duerlinger's is that they are trying to get at the meaning of the Dialogues in a backward fashion. The way to understand the verbal dispute is to see it as part of the whole argument not the whole argument as part of it.

[2] Hume, Dialogues, p. 227.

This is all that natural reason can tell us.

But Philo has another point to make, and it is in keeping with his position of agnosticism. The Oxford English Dictionary defines an agnostic as

> One who holds that the existence of anything beyond and behind material phenomena is unknown and (so far as can be judged) unknowable . . . .

This is Philo's position: reason simply cannot tell us anything about the nature of the deity that the design argument posits. But an agnostic, unlike an atheist, does not make the claim that a deity does not exist: he is content to say that if a deity does exist, we cannot know anything about that deity.

This leaves open the possibility of 'belief'. One may believe in a deity, and a deity of any particular kind, even though this belief is unsupported by reason. And the causes of such a belief may be many, both of a personal and a social nature. Cleanthes has claimed that his belief in his system of theology is "supported by strong and obvious reason, by natural propensity, and by early education." Philo has shown, however, that it is not supported by "strong and obvious reason." As to its being supported by a "natural propensity", Philo has also made his answer, though not as directly. Throughout the Dialogues Philo has contrasted Cleanthes' theory with many others. He has referred to the Epicurean hypothesis, the theogonies of the ancients, the

theory of the Brahmins[1] -- in all of which cases, the adherents have held their theories to be the most obvious and the most strongly supported by natural phenomena. But if any one of these is the correct one, then all the others are incorrect; if any one of these is supported by a "natural propensity", then all the others cannot be. We might at this point, however, make a distinction. It is one thing to say that the mind has a "natural propensity" towards believing that the ordered world has a cause; it is quite another thing to say that the mind has a "natural propensity" towards believing that the ordered world has a specific cause.[2] With regard to the former, not only does Philo not dispute it, he even suggests several instances. But what is at issue here is Cleanthes' claim that there is a "natural propensity" of the mind towards his own design argument. It is this point that Philo denies.

How then may we account for Cleanthes' claim that his is the right one? Hume, himself, gave the answer to this, and he gave it in a passage in the Treatise that bears remarkable similarity to Cleanthes' statement on page 155. Hume says:

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[1] Ibid., pp. 171, 180, 182.

[2] In other words, the former might well be universal whereas the latter would vary according to particular circumstance, such as time, culture, tradition, etc.

> 'Tis not solely in poetry and music, we must follow our taste and sentiment, but likewise in philosophy. When I am convinc'd of any principle, 'tis only an idea, which strikes more strongly upon me. When I give the preference to one set of arguments above another, I do nothing but decide from my feeling concerning the superiority of their influence.[1]

The answer then is not that there is a "natural propensity" towards the design argument, but rather that Cleanthes himself has a propensity of the mind towards it. And to what is this propensity due? Most likely, just what Cleanthes said: "early education".[2] Education, religious training, politics, personal feeling -- all are influences on the beliefs a man will have.[3] One man may, as the result of these influences, see the design argument as utterly convincing, while another might not. But reason cannot arbitrate for it is not a question of 'reason', it is a question of 'feeling'. As Pamphilus pointed out to Hermippus, at the beginning of the Dialogues:

> Reasonable men may be allowed to differ, when no one can reasonably be positive: Opposite sentiments, even without any decision, afford an agreeable amusement.[4]

Cleanthes, therefore, is entitled to his belief, but he is not entitled to think that his belief is supported by

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[1] Hume, Treatise, p. 103. See p. 31 of this paper.

[2] Hume, Dialogues, p. 216.

[3] "Byasses from prejudice, education, passion, party, etc. hang more upon one mind than another." Hume, Enquiry, p. 107. See p. 32 of this paper.

[4] Hume, Dialogues, p. 128.

reason; for Philo has shown that this is not the case. Even Pamphilus, the pupil of Cleanthes, has appreciated this, for he says to Hermippus when reporting the dialogue between Cleanthes and Philo:

> . . . what obscure questions occur, concerning the nature of that divine Being; his attributes, his decrees, his plan of providence? These have always been subjected to the disputations of men: Concerning these, human reason has not reached any certain determination: But these are topics so interesting, that we cannot restrain our restless enquiry with regard to them; though nothing but doubt, uncertainty, and contradiction, have, as yet, been the result of our most accurate researches.[1]

What then is the believer to do? He must flee "the haughty dogmatist, persuaded that he can erect a complete system of theology by the mere help of philosophy" and instead, "fly to revealed truth with the greatest avidity." For it is through an awareness of "the imperfections of natural reason" that the believer comes at last to recognize that religion is supported by 'faith', and not by 'reason'; and therefore "To be a philosophical sceptic is, in a man of letters, the first and most essential step towards being a sound, believing Christian."[2]

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[1] Ibid. (Emphasis mine).

[2] Ibid., pp. 227-228.

CHAPTER IV

CHARACTER IDENTIFICATION IN THE DIALOGUES

In his review of Hendel's Studies in the Philosophy of David Hume, John Laird remarked "Certainly Hume cannot be identified straightway with any one of the interlocutors" in the Dialogues. Shortly thereafter, in an article in Mind in 1926, Laird, apparently after further thought on the matter, stated "In short, Hume is very like Philo". By the time he published Hume's Philosophy of Human Nature in 1932, Laird was sure that "Philo was much the largest part of Hume."[1] Yet seven years later, having once more considered the issue, Laird carefully proclaimed that Hume "may well have been very often Cleanthine; and I think he was."[2] Laird's uncertainty dramatizes the difficulty that commentators have experienced when trying to identify one of the disputants in the Dialogues with Hume. Whichever character one chooses as Hume's spokesman -- if, indeed, any -- one must take into account the information available from two sources: the Hume letters,

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[1]Cited in C. W. Hendel, Studies in the Philosophy of David Hume (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963), p. xxxvii.

[2]J. Laird, "Symposium: The Present-Day Relevance of Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion," Aristotelian Society Supplementary (Vols. 17-18, 1939): 207.

and the Hume corpus, insofar as each of these bear on the Dialogues.

In this chapter we shall be considering three approaches to character identification. The first holds that Cleanthes is Hume; the second argues that Hume is not represented by any one character but with all, in the sense that the Dialogues is an account of Hume's uncertainty with regard to the issues involved in Natural Religion; and the third claims that Philo is Hume. We shall be arguing in support of the third alternative, concluding as did Haytor that "The fact indeed indisputably is, that Philo, not Cleanthes, personates Mr. Hume."[1]

Cleanthes is Hume

The first approach to character identification in the Dialogues consists of identifying Cleanthes with Hume. This interpretation became popular in the nineteenth century largely because of the publication of some of Hume's letters.[2] The two passages most often cited in support of this thesis occur in a letter to Elliot in 1751 in which Hume remarks: "You wou'd perceive by the Sample I have given you, that I make Cleanthes the Hero of the Dialogue"[3] and in a letter to

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[1] Haytor, Remarks on Mr. Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, p. 2.

[2] These were published both in Ritchie's biography (1807) and Burton's (1846).

[3] Hume, Letters, I: p. 153.

Strachan in 1776 in which Hume says that Philo "is indeed refuted, and at last gives up the Argument, nay confesses that he was only amusing himself by all his Cavils . . . ."[1]

With regard to the letter to Elliot, commentators, by and large, have been wary of attributing too much significance to it. This is due to the fact that while in the quoted passage Hume seems to favour Cleanthes, other passages indicate that his natural sympathies lie with Philo.

> Had it been my good Fortune to live near you, I shou'd have taken on me the Character of Philo, in the Dialogue, which you'll own I coud have supported naturally enough . . . .

Laing[2] and Knight[3] are two commentators who do use the Elliot letter in supporting their claim that Cleanthes is Hume, and both ignore those passages that point in the opposite direction. Unfortunately, because of the opposing natures of the passages in the letter, its value for character identification is neutralized. Either interpretation can claim partial support but any attempt to reconcile all the passages with one viewpoint can only result in an undue amount of psychological speculation -- a path betier left untrodden.

A final point with regard to the Elliot letter: Laing claims that Hume is making ". . . a definite request

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[1] Ibid., II: p. 323.

[2] B. M. Laing, "Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion," Philosophy (April, 1937): 175-190.

[3] W. Knight, Hume (Wm. Blackwood and Sons, 1886).

for assistance in strengthening the case of Cleanthes who, he says, is made the hero of the Dialogues."[1] While superficially true, it is doubtful that this statement carries with it the implication that Laing is after: namely, that Hume means to identify himself in the Dialogues with Cleanthes. For why, it might be asked, would a man of Hume's powerful and searching intellect find it necessary to ask such a man as Elliot to 'strengthen' his own argument, if indeed it is Cleanthes who is speaking for Hume?

While the Elliot letter is indirect in its statements, the letter to Strachan is not. Hume bluntly states that Cleanthes has won the argument over Philo and with regard to this assertion Laing notes:

> Either this statement must be regarded as another bit of egregious "artfulness", with the consequence that the Dialogues as well as Hume's other philosophical writings have to be considered as all a playful jest, or else it must be taken in all seriousness as expressing what Hume believed the Dialogues to be, with the consequence that he quite clearly identifies himself with Cleanthes.[2]

Now Laing notwithstanding, it does not follow that if Hume did not mean what he said to Strachan, that his entire philosophy must be regarded as "jest." In fact, consideration of the circumstances surrounding the letter to Strachan suggest another, more likely, alternative.

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[1] Laing, "Hume's Dialogues", p. 177.

[2] Ibid.

Both Elliot and Adam Smith had long cautioned Hume against publishing his Dialogues for fear of the reaction it would cause.[1] Smith, in fact, refused to be associated with it when approached by Hume -- who asked him to ensure its publication should he die -- in May 1776.[2] One month later, with his health rapidly deteriorating and death nearing, Hume wrote Strachan, hoping to arrange publication of the Dialogues.[3] That Hume feared the worst in this enterprise is clear from the letter.

Although Strachan had fared well as Hume's publisher, Hume felt it necessary to offer him four hundred free copies of the Dialogues if he should but publish it. He even went so far as to suggest that "It is not necessary you should prefix your Name to the Title Page." And, as if this were not enough of an inducement to publish, he adds:

> I seriously declare, that after Mr. Millar and You and Mr. Cadell have publickly avowed your Publication of the Enquiry concerning Human Understanding, I know no Reason why you shoud have the least Scruple with regard to these Dialogues. They will be much less obnoxious to the Law, and not more exposed to popular Clamour. . . . Mallet never sufferd any thing by being the Editor of Bolingbroke's Works.

It should be clear from the letter that Hume was extremely concerned that his Dialogues might not be published. Were he to admit that Philo had won the argument over

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[1] Hume, Dialogues, p. 88.

[2] Hume, Letters, II: pp. 316-318.

[3] Ibid., pp. 322-324.

Cleanthes, Strachan would certainly not have published the Dialogues. Consequently, Hume sought to nullify the importance of Philo's arguments by suggesting that he was never really serious. He need not have troubled himself for Strachan resolutely refused to publish anyway and Hume was driven to making yet other arrangements.

In his "Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion" Laing makes the following serious charge:

> The views expounded by Philo are stated in terms which are rejected by Hume in his general philosophy. They assume a clear and precise distinction between mind and matter which Hume's philosophy denies. Philo uses the notion of "actuating force" several times; he speaks in terms of productive power or energy which Hume has elsewhere ruled out . . . .[1]

It is unfortunate that Laing, in making such sweeping charges, did not see fit to indicate those areas in the text of the Dialogues where Philo is supposedly being so non-Humean.

Nevertheless, with regard to the 'mind-matter' distinction, it is Cleanthes -- not Philo -- who makes it. And he does so because the design argument, which he is advancing, requires it. Are we therefore to blame Philo for arguing within the context provided by Cleanthes? Should we turn the tables on Laing and point out that Cleanthes is the one who is arguing in such a non-Humean fashion and therefore cannot be Hume? Of course not. Rather we should merely point out

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[1] Laing, "Hume's Dialogues", p. 178.

that any discussion of Natural Religion, involving as it does the design argument, necessarily requires that the distinction be made.

When it comes to Laing's point that Philo uses terms like "actuating force" and "productive power" can we not make the same point in answering? Even so, as noted in Chapter III, in the passages where these terms come under discussion (Part IV[161] and Parts VII and VIII) it is Philo -- not Cleanthes -- who shows an awareness that the meaning of these words is far from clear.

> But reason, in its internal fabric and structure, is really as little known to us as instinct or vegetation . . . . These words, generation, reason, mark only certain powers and energies in nature, whose effects are known, but whose essence is incomprehensible . . . .[1]

Concerning Laing's charges, it would appear that Philo is showing the same careful consideration of the issues involved that Hume did, and that it is Cleanthes who is simply taking things at face-value.

Before moving on to a consideration of the second approach to character identification in the Dialogues, we might make an observation about the problem facing those commentators who hold that Cleanthes is Hume. For if Cleanthes is Hume what was he arguing for in the Dialogues?

If Hume is arguing for Natural Religion, then he may

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[1]Hume, Dialogues, p. 178.

be counted as one among many in a long tradition in which he has the particular disadvantage of merely rephrasing old arguments. Happily, few commentators are willing to give such a low estimate of the Dialogues. However, when pressed to give an alternative interpretation, they are hard-put to come up with one. Knight was clearly confused about what to say that Hume might have believed.

> [Although he] distinctly inclined toward a theistic belief of some sort . . . its intellectual form was exceedingly airy, spectral, and nebulous.[1]

Nor have others supporting the 'Cleanthes is Hume' viewpoint fared much better. Laing made the incredible claim that the real accomplishment of the Dialogues lay in Cleanthes' "theory of a finite Deity."[2] A somewhat miniscule contribution to the philosophy of religion by Hume! The 'theory' -- as Laing so generously calls it -- is mentioned by Cleanthes in the opening paragraph of Part XI and never again.[3]

No One is Hume

The most notable exponents of the second approach to character identification are Metz and Hendel. Metz puts the position in the following way:

> Though Philo may seem for quite long stretches of the argument to be Hume's direct mouthpiece, it

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[1]Knight, Hume, p. 207.

[2]Laing, 'Hume's Dialogues', p. 187.

[3]Hume, Dialogues, p. 203.

> would be very much of a mistake to identify his own opinion with what this personnage (or indeed any other one) says. For the truth is rather in the whole, that is to say, it is not only in the several speakers who may have a greater or less share in it but in the dramatized dialectic of all their views.[1]

Hendel concurs, adding that Hume "was actually dramatizing, in the Dialogues, the inner conflict of his own mind."[2]

This interpretation has its obvious attractions. Firstly, it is true that at one time or another each of the three disputants in the Dialogues espouses Humean points of view. Secondly, we do know that the issues they discussed had been of concern to Hume. However, while both these points may be granted, they still do not stand in the way of identifying one interlocutor with Hume. That the characters in any dialogue portray aspects of their creator is probably inevitable. What is of concern is which character seems most clearly to emulate the significant philosophical positions of the author. It should also not be surprising that Hume had shown himself to be concerned by the topics discussed in the Dialogues. Religion was a highly visible and extremely important factor in eighteenth century England, as we have seen. It would be much more surprising to learn that he had not been concerned by the issues and yet had devoted so much time and effort to them.

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[1] Cited in Hendel, Studies, pp. xxix-xxx.

[2] Ibid., p. xvi.

The most serious drawback to the Metz-Mendel interpretation lies not so much in what they do say, but in what they do not. Our analysis of the Dialogues has shown Philo to be the victor in his argument with Cleanthes over the design argument, and it has shown the important consequences Philo's views held for Natural Religion. To deny that Philo is Hume is to lessen the contribution that Hume made to the controversy surrounding Natural Religion. It is also to underplay the carefully worked out arguments insofar as these bear on the conclusions reached.[1]

Philo is Hume

Our analysis of the Dialogues in Chapter III led us to the conclusion that insofar as it is Philo who wins the argument, it must be he who was meant to speak for Hume. As well, the other interpretations concerning character identification in the Dialogues we found to be insufficient in one way or another. Finally, in order to place beyond doubt our interpretation, we shall examine Philo's position on the role of reason in religion, and shall see that it exactly parallels Hume's.

Concerning the design analogy, Hume and Philo are in agreement. Hume never denied the analogy; in fact there are

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[1] "In every Dialogue, no more than one person can be supposed to represent the author." Hume, Letters, I: p. 173.

numerous instances where he accepts it.[1] The following two quotes, the first by Philo, reveal the similarity of their views.

> A purpose, an intention, or design strikes everywhere the most careless, the most stupid thinker; and no man can be so hardened in absurd systems, as at all times to reject it.[2]

> The whole frame of nature bespeaks an intelligent author; and no rational enquirer can, after serious reflection, suspend his belief a moment with regard to the primary principles of genuine Theism and Religion.[3]

As far back as Part V of the Dialogues, Philo was arguing that "the immense grandeur and magnificence of the works of nature" were arguments for "the true system of Theism."[4] So Philo and Hume, so far as concerns the analogy of design, share the same view.

When it comes to the question of how much reason is able to reveal about the attributes of the Deity, however, Philo and Cleanthes part company; the former claiming that it reveals nothing more than possible intelligence, while Cleanthes claims that much can be discovered. Here again, Hume and Philo are in agreement as the following passages show.

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[1] See also Treatise, p. 633; Natural History, pp. 26, 74.

[2] Hume, Dialogues, p. 214.

[3] Hume, Natural History, p. 21.

[4] Hume, Dialogues, p. 165.

> . . . philosophical sceptics . . . endeavour to suspend all judgment with regard to such sublime and such extraordinary subjects,
> . . . the most natural sentiment, which a well-disposed mind will feel . . . is a longing desire and expectation, that Heaven would be pleased to dissipate, at least alleviate, this profound ignorance, by affording some more particular revelation to mankind, and making discoveries of the nature, attributes, and operations of the divine object of our Faith.[1]

> The whole is a riddle, an aenigma, an inexplicable mystery. Doubt, uncertainty, suspence of judgment appear the only result of our most accurate scrutiny, concerning this subject.
> . . . while we ourselves . . . happily make our escape into the calm, though obscure, regions of philosophy.[2]

> What experience have we with regard to superior beings? How can we ascribe to them any Sentiments at all?[3]

> . . . the Deity . . . is no Object either of the Senses or Imagination, and very little of the Understanding.[4]

The third, and by far the most important, point of agreement between Hume and Philo -- and completely in opposition to Cleanthes -- is that Christianity (or more generally religious systems) is founded on faith not on reason.

> . . . the haughty dogmatist, persuaded that he can erect a complete system of theology, by the mere help of philosophy, disdains any farther aid, and rejects this adventitious instructor [revelation]

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[1] Ibid., p. 227.

[2] Hume, Natural History, p. 76. (Emphasis mine).

[3] Hume, Letters, I: p. 16.

[4] Ibid., p. 21.

> To be a philosophical sceptic is, in a man of letters, the first and most essential step towards being a sound, believing Christian . . . .[1]

Compare that statement of Philo's to these two made by Hume (noted in Chapter II):

> I am the better pleased with the method of reasoning here delivered, as I think it may serve to confound those dangerous friends or disguised enemies to the Christian Religion, who have undertaken to defend it by the principles of human reason. Our most holy religion is founded on faith, not on reason; and it is a sure method of exposing it to put it to such a trial as it is, by no means, fitted to endure.[2]

> Divinity or Theology . . . has a foundation in reason, so far as it is supported by experience. But its best and most solid foundation is faith and divine revelation.[3]

These three points show Philo and not Cleanthes -- the defender of Natural Religion -- to be in essential agreement with Hume. Further, Philo and Hume also agree on more minor points. Both oppose superstition in organized religion[4]; neither believes in a future state;[5] and both consider

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[1] Hume, Dialogues, pp. 227-228.

[2] Hume, Enquiries, p. 130. See p. 33 of this paper.

[3] Ibid., p. 165. See p. 27 of this paper.

[4] Cf. Dialogues, p. 219; Treatise, pp. 99-100, 515, 524; Natural History, pp. 56, 67, 72.

[5] Cf. Dialogues, p. 220; David Hume, Essays (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 601-602; "Interview With David Hume," in Hume, Dialogues, pp. 76-77.

organized religion in general and the clergy in particular to be bad influences.[1]

Finally, and perhaps the strongest indication that Philo, who opposes Natural Religion, is to be identified with Hume comes in the following passage from Hume's Essays:

> . . . an abstract, invisible object, like that which natural religion alone presents to us, cannot long actuate the mind, or be of any moment in life.[2]

The conclusion to be drawn from the preceding discussion is unavoidable: so far as any character can be said to represent Hume's views in the Dialogues, that character is Philo and not Cleanthes. This is not to say that Cleanthes and Hume share no common ground -- even Demea and Hume have similar opinions on some subjects.[3] But that they should all espouse some Humean views was a condition necessary for the very writing of the Dialogues. And that Cleanthes should not appear a decided idiot, by advancing only the most superficial arguments, was due to Hume's wish to avoid "putting nothing but Nonsense into the Mouth of the Adversary."[4] The conclusion, then, is, as it was put by the author of the

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[1] Cf. Dialogues, pp. 220-222; Essays, pp. 51, 57, 60-61, 65, 204-206; Natural History, pp. 44, 54, 75; Treatise, p. 272; Letters, I: p. 153.

[2] Hume, Essays, p. 170.

[3] See Demea's description of the human mind, pp. 156-157.

[4] Hume, Letters, I: p. 154.

first reply to Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion:

> The fact indeed indisputably is, that Philo, not Cleanthes, personates Mr. Hume.[1]

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[1] Haytor, Remarks, p. 2.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

We began our investigation of the Dialogues by asking two questions: Which character in the Dialogues is meant to speak for Hume? and What conclusions did Hume draw with regard to Natural Religion?

Before attempting to answer these queries we reviewed briefly the religious controversy that enveloped the age before Hume's. We noted the growth of free-thinking, particularly in the hands of the Deists, and the ever-increasing role of empirical reasoning in the affairs of man, as developed largely by the scientists of the Royal Society. We saw these two, intially separate, groups unite by virtue of the design argument to support what was known as Natural Religion.

We then turned our attention to Hume's general philosophy, with particular regard to his doctrine of belief, in order to determine how far it was consonant with the claims of those favouring Natural Religion. We noted that Hume's philosophy was agnostic, or skeptical, in general and thereby denied to reason the sweeping powers necessary for the support of a religion of nature. In particular we considered Hume's statements in his Enquiry where he suggested that faith,

rather than reason, provided a surer foundation for religion.

Having prepared ourselves historically and with regard to Hume's philosophy, we moved to a consideration of the Dialogues. We examined Cleanthes' presentation of the design argument and the various criticisms Philo made of it. We saw that while Philo was ready to admit that the analogy to a divine intelligence was, in itself plausible, he would not accept that this was sufficient basis upon which to establish a system of religion -- a Natural Religion. The conclusion he drew from this, alike with Hume's in the Enquiry, was that faith, and not reason, was the best support a religion could have.

Finally, we considered various arguments against the identification of Philo with Hume and found them inadequate at best. We then compared the various positions and statements on religion of Philo and Hume and concluded that, indeed, in the Dialogues Philo was meant to speak for Hume.

It remains only to point out that our study of the Dialogues has yielded us little insight into Hume's final speculations on religion beyond the generally negative claim that reason does not lead to religion. With regard to the vague nature of Hume's final position, Laing, in his book David Hume lamented:

> . . . that Hume, who was well aware of this attitude towards himself, did not meet his critics and endeavour to elucidate his position.[1]

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[1] B. M. Laing, David Hume (London: E. Benn, 1932), p. 174.

But the answer to Laing's question had been given by Hume long ago, when in writing to the Reverend George Campbell, concerning the latter's attack on his "Essay on Miracles", he remarked:

> . . . I had fixed a resolution, in the beginning of my life, always to leave the public to judge between my adversaries and me, without making any reply.[1]

To the very end Hume stuck by his resolution, and posterity has never stopped judging him. Whether he considered himself a Christian or whether he entertained some sort of belief in what he called 'true religion' must remain for us unanswered. In all likelihood, Hume would have ascribed to the motto of the first Lord Shaftesbury, who when asked "What is your religion?" responded "The religion of all sensible men" and when further asked "And what is the religion of all sensible men?" replied "Sensible men never tell."[2]

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[1] Hume, Letters, I: p. 361.

[2] Cited in L. Stephen, History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century, Vol. 1 (New York: Peter Smith, 1949), p. 342.

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